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Lost in Transition: Hugh Walpole 1909-1941

John Cameron Hartley

Thesis submitted for the Open University PhD research degree February 2020

English School of Arts and Humanities, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

This is to confirm that this thesis is my original previously unpublished work

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Abstract

Hugh Walpole was born in 1884, and arrived on the literary scene at the first attempt with his novel *The Wooden Horse* (1909), just as literary modernism was making its mark. Loyal to the traditional novel of plot and character, he was nevertheless aware that writers of his own generation were breaking new literary ground, and he would express the ambition to create a novel of transition marrying tradition and modern experiment. His commercial success, unabashed occupation of the middlebrow middle-ground, adherence to a tradition of romance writing, and love of the macabre, would put him at odds with highbrow modernism, even as he moved in the same circles and published in the same journals.

Eager to be seen as a serious novelist, and recognising the turbulent times he was living through, Walpole embarked upon a sequence of novels charting the first three decades of the twentieth-century, concentrating upon life in the city, in the provinces, and in the countryside. As he wrote, the world was plunged into war, revolution, and economic crisis. Alongside his social novels he produced genre macabres and historical fiction while writing literary criticism in his *belles lettres*, and charting the culture wars between middlebrow and highbrow.

With reference to a variety of creative writers and critics of his own day, including Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad, and John Middleton Murry, and current critics of Gothic Modernism, this study considers two contexts as background to Walpole's literary career: literary modernism which dominates any study of the period, and the romantic tradition which underpins his own writing. Then, through close reading of the texts, the study examines if Walpole succeeded in documenting his times by creating his literature of transition, and his value as a witness to turbulent times.

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Introduction

He remains a remarkable literary phenomenon, a substantial-seeming planet who turns out to have been a meteor.¹

Michael Schmidt, *The Novel: A Biography*

At various points during a thirty-two-year literary career, Hugh Walpole revealed three ambitions which this study will harness to steer a way through the mass of novels, short stories, and critical works he produced in that time. In a preface to the Cumberland Edition of his novel *Harmer John* (1934 [1926]), he explained that around the year 1914 he had planned a sequence of novels to represent ‘the life of England in the first thirty years of the twentieth century’.² In an autobiographical note accompanying his contribution to *The Best British Short Stories of 1926*, by which time he had been a published writer for seventeen years, Walpole expressed his intention of producing ‘novels that will follow the main tradition of the English novel, but that will be aware of the modern technique and modern psychology’.³ In an entry from his journal in 1927, when embarking upon the sequence of historical novels that would be collected as *The Herries Chronicle* (1939), he wrote, ‘These four novels will *clinch* my reputation or I’ll die in the attempt’.⁴ Taken together these aspirations hint at his ambition to be considered as a serious writer: a chronicler of his times, a transitional writer marrying tradition with modernity, and an author seeking to consolidate his standing by reviving an unfashionable genre. During the course of this study, these ambitions will be considered as they arise within their particular contexts, and in terms of the work to which they are allied: Walpole’s social novels, his genre titles, and his historical fiction.

¹ Michael Schmidt, *The Novel: A Biography* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 594.

² Hugh Walpole, ‘Preface’, *Harmer John*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. viii. Subsequent references are to this edition. ‘Walpole’ in footnotes refers to Hugh Walpole throughout, except where explicitly stated.

³ Walpole, in Edward J. O’Brien, ed., *Best British Short Stories of 1926* (New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1926), pp. 424-425. Subsequent references are to this title.

⁴ Walpole, journal entry, in Rupert Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole* (Thrupp, Sutton, 1997), p. 279. Subsequent references to Hart-Davis refer to this title.

Hugh Walpole is a mere footnote within any English literary history of the 1920s and 1930s. Accounts of his career are occasionally resurrected to illustrate the transitory nature of fame, or as the background to anecdotes concerning the minor literary scandal resulting from his caricature as Alroy Kear in Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ale* (1930). Walpole's actual writing career, the work itself, has consequently become obscure in the shadows cast by the emphasis on these particular aspects of his life. Equally emphatic in the relegation of Walpole to the margins of history is the periodisation of literature, which foregrounds modernism, and its roll-call of writers, as representative of that era.⁵

Hugh Walpole was a popular, commercially successful author, and one of the most prominent cultural figures of his day, a profile he enjoyed through his prolific output, his flair for self-publicity, and by engaging with his times through his work. A near-contemporary of writers like Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot, Walpole nevertheless considered himself a traditional writer, owing allegiance to the novel-form established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Despite displaying an initial conciliatory approach to literary modernism he would increasingly come to be in conflict with what he felt it represented.

The son of an Anglican Bishop, Hugh Walpole was descended on his father's side from Horace Walpole, author of the book considered to be the first Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). On his mother's side Hugh was descended from Richard Barham who, as Thomas Ingoldsby, wrote the anthology of folk myths collected as *The Ingoldsby Legends* (1840 and after). As a child at boarding-school Walpole experienced the bullying that had an effect on his emotional health even into his adult years, and which seems to have coloured his 'concept of Evil' in his fiction, as recounted in *Hugh Walpole* (1952) by his biographer

⁵ See Ted Underwood, *Why Literary Periods Mattered* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2013), chapters 3 and 4, for a debate on the rationale for periodisation and some alternatives. Subsequent references to Underwood are to this title.

Rupert Hart Davis.⁶ During an unhappy time at a variety of educational establishments Walpole sought comfort in literature, usually popular genre fiction, as recalled in his volumes of autobiography *The Crystal Box* (1924) and *The Apple Trees* (1932).⁷

Initially intended to follow his father into the church, Walpole had a disastrous tenure working in a Seaman's Mission in Liverpool, after which he taught for a while at Epsom College where, once again, he proved undistinguished. Having started writing fiction seriously from around 1905, while an undergraduate at Cambridge University, he then began to court professional writers. He wrote fan letters to the Cornish novelist Charles Marriott, the Irish historical novelist Ethel Colburn Mayne, and to E. M. Forster, and asked them for advice with his own writing. On the basis of that advice he 'concocted', as he would put it, a novel, *The Wooden Horse* (1909), which was accepted, at the very first attempt, by publishers Smith Elder, whereupon he was introduced into literary London by Robert Ross.⁸ A third novel *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill* (1911), a *roman à clef* based on his time at Epsom College, started to get him serious critical attention, and he also formed a friendship with Henry James whom he came to look upon as a mentor. As well as courting established literary figures for advice, Walpole's own novels often pay subtle homage to writers he admired, such as Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and Joseph Conrad.⁹

Hugh Walpole would not only 'concoct' his first novel, he would go on to construct his image as the typical English Man of Letters, L. A. G. Strong notes of the author that he built

⁶ Hart-Davis, pp.17-21.

⁷ Walpole, *The Crystal Box* (Glasgow, Robert Maclehose & Co, The University Press, 1924), pp. 33-39, and *The Apple Trees: Four Reminiscences* (Waltham Saint Lawrence: The Golden Cockerel Press, 1932), p. 10. Subsequent references are to these editions.

⁸ Walpole, 'Preface', *Maradick at Forty* (London, Macmillan, 1934) pp. vii-viii. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹ In 1918 Walpole wrote to Arnold Bennett seeking reassurance, after E. V. Lucas had suggested that while Walpole's talk was individual, his writing was often at second hand, as he remembered 'too much of other people's things', noted in Hart-Davis, pp. 168-169. While Bennett offered Walpole his support, Lucas's argument has some merit.

up this ‘commanding position’ with ‘conscious care’.¹⁰ Although born in New Zealand there is no evidence that Walpole, given his ancestry, thought of himself as anything other than English.¹¹ Fragments of autobiography, recalling a childhood writing ‘endless historical romances’ and reading ‘innumerable novels’, established his literary antecedents.¹² The fact of this ‘construction’ in no way detracts from Hugh Walpole’s very real gifts as a writer, Strong pays tribute to Walpole’s knowledge of the novelist’s craft, and the range of his reading.¹³ A discrete homosexual growing up in an England where the trials of Oscar Wilde were within recent memory, Hugh Walpole was also required to construct a persona to stay upon the right side of British criminal law.¹⁴

In 1914 Walpole published *The Duchess of Wrexe*; it was his sixth novel since *The Wooden Horse*. In between, the favourable reviews for *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill* had been followed by the success of the bildungsroman *Fortitude* in 1913. The other novels, *Maradick at Forty: A Transition* (1910), and *Prelude to Adventure* (1912), had been reasonably if not rapturously received and Walpole was publishing a novel a year and could consider himself established. *The Duchess of Wrexe* was planned as the first in a sequence of books intended to chronicle ‘the extraordinary transitional period in which we are living’.¹⁵ Walpole notes in his preface to the 1934 Cumberland Edition that *The Duchess of Wrexe* had appeared in a year marking a seismic change politically, socially, and economically, ‘a break from all the conditions that

¹⁰ L. A. G. Strong, ‘Hugh Walpole’, *Personal Remarks* (London, Peter Nevill, 1953), p. 223. Subsequent references are to this title.

¹¹ However, within works of fiction that endeavour to encapsulate what England and Englishness might mean, there is a recurrent emphasis on the status of the outsider or, in the term used by this study, the ‘intruder’.

¹² Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, p. 34.

¹³ Strong, p. 225.

¹⁴ It is tempting to read Walpole’s fictional celebrations of close male friendships as coded references to homosexuality, while this is perfectly valid such friendships may equally be taken at face value. As Walpole wrote to Joseph Hergesheimer, ‘so many people will see it only as homosexual, which is the last thing it generally is’, in Hart-Davis, p. 193.

¹⁵ Walpole, ‘Preface’, *The Young Enchanted*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. xi. Subsequent references are to this edition.

belonged to the world of 1913'.¹⁶ Walpole references Compton Mackenzie's recent literary memoir *Literature in My Time* (1933), and his observation that young novelists starting out around 1908 had seen the Boer War, which ended in 1902, as representing the great crisis of their era, only to find it superseded by a greater conflict. In Walpole's words, these writers re-emerged in 1920 'almost middle-aged, belonging to no world, too young to be truly Edwardian, too old to be creators of the future'.¹⁷ A potent myth, and one that nourishes Walpole's eventual construction of himself, as an unfashionable romantic novelist attempting to bridge the gap between traditional narrative and modernist experiment, a rift created in this case by the half-decade consumed by war. It is worth stressing that in locating his transitional status, Walpole is not presenting his writing as something new and evolving. To claim that he is too young to be Edwardian, and too old to be truly modern, shows an awareness that he risks being anchored in his own moment of time, and consequently lost in transition. Providing a bridge between literary eras seems a modest ambition in those circumstances. Arguably, a precedent for such a transitional status had already been set by Ford Madox Ford and Joseph Conrad, whose literary impressionism, a subjective approach to narrative incident, did allow for an evolution into the avant-garde.¹⁸ Rob Hawkes, with reference to Ford Madox Ford's transitional 'misfit' status, argues convincingly that 'the destabilising narrative practices' of Ford and his 'fellow misfits', were a direct response to the uncertain times that they lived through.¹⁹

¹⁶ Walpole, 'Preface', *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. vii. Subsequent references are to this edition except where stated.

¹⁷ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

¹⁸ Ford also advocated for novelists to act as the historians of their time, a notion that would come to interest Hugh Walpole. See Gene M. Moore, 'The Tory in a Time of Change: Social Aspects of Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*', in *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 28, Number 1, Spring 1982, pp. 49-68 (Duke University Press), p. 49 at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/441444> [accessed 22/09/2020].

¹⁹ Rob Hawkes, *Ford Madox Ford and the Misfit Moderns* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 11. Subsequent references are to this title.

1914 brought something of an endorsement from Walpole's mentor, the writer Henry James, to which *The Duchess of Wrexhe* had owed a stylistic debt, although James himself seemed oblivious to it.²⁰ In an article for the *Times Literary Supplement*, in which he eschewed an analysis of new writing in favour of celebrating writers whom he discerned as sustaining tradition, James would choose Hugh Walpole as a member of his "Younger Generation" of novelists.

Julian Symons has taken Henry James to task for what he sees as the anachronism of representing this 'Younger Generation' by the examples of Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, Compton Mackenzie, Hugh Walpole and H. G. Wells.²¹ It is true that this group ranges in age from Walpole, the youngest at thirty, to Conrad at fifty-seven, and hardly constitutes a generation, although Symons does manage to get most of the writers' ages wrong. Symons's point that these writers were Victorian in style and Edwardian in tone is essentially correct, but it is that express continuity that James was celebrating. In 'The New Novel', in *Notes on Novelists* (1914), a revised reprinting of the *TLS* articles, James is clearly aware that the older men 'are not so young as the youngest' and do not share their 'early bloom', but he is optimistic about the health of the novel form in these hands.²² James included D. H. Lawrence in his list, but his somewhat cool endorsement is appended with the trademark clauses and qualifications which very often render his precise meaning obscure; he writes of having to be '*very* [his italics] friendly to Mr Lawrence'.²³ This apparent slighting of Lawrence and singling out of Walpole for praise is cited by Elizabeth Steele as a defining moment in Walpole's relationship with nascent literary modernism. In Steele's not altogether

²⁰ Elizabeth Steele, *Hugh Walpole* (New York, Twayne Publishers Inc., 1972), pp.95-96. Subsequent references to Steele are to this title in this edition.

²¹ Julian Symons, *Makers of the New: The Revolution in Literature, 1912-1939* (London, Andre Deutsch, 1987), pp.67-68.

²² Henry James, 'The New Novel' in *Notes on Novelists: with some other notes* (New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 318.

²³ James, 'The New Novel' in *Notes on Novelists: with some other notes*, p. 329.

convincing assessment Hugh Walpole is damned in the eyes of modernists by association with a superannuated generation at the expense of the proponents of the 'modern' novel. In fact, Hugh Walpole's relationship with literary modernism was more complicated than that, as Steele herself points out. Using the generational terms coined by Virginia Woolf in her piece *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (1924), Steele notes that Walpole, 'though temporally one with the Georgians, was temperamentally an Edwardian'.²⁴ A contemporary of Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot, Walpole was nevertheless steeped in the literary traditions of a previous era. Where transitional writers like Ford and Conrad, Rob Hawkes's 'misfit moderns', embraced new technical approaches to reflect or respond to changing times, Hugh Walpole, a misfit romantic in his own right, would argue for the preservation of tradition as a counter to uncertainty.²⁵

Henry James in his 'Younger Generation' essay of 1914 had been optimistic for the future of the novel in the hands of pre-war writers, although J. B. Priestley refers to it as 'a piece of literary criticism so involved, so inscrutable, that some of the writers it dealt with do not know to this day whether he was praising them or blaming them'.²⁶ James cited Walpole, Gilbert Cannan, Compton Mackenzie, D. H. Lawrence, and Edith Wharton, among his new novelists. Priestley notes in 1928 that of these, Mackenzie had not maintained the promise shown by *Carnival* (1912) and *Sinister Street* (1914), and Cannan, a member of Lady Ottoline Morrell's circle, had left literature altogether.²⁷ Priestley makes no observation on the dismissal of D. H. Lawrence by James, or upon any of his other notable omissions. Walpole himself, while pleased with the Henry James piece found it equally inscrutable. He

²⁴ Steele, *Hugh Walpole*, pp.20-21. Steele unfortunately undermines her own argument by claiming that the modernists would have been offended by James's praise of Walpole while disparaging Lawrence and E. M. Forster, James does not in fact mention Forster, and can therefore only be charged with a sin of omission.

²⁵ Walpole, 'Preface', *The Thirteen Travellers*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), pp. ix-x. Subsequent references are to this title.

²⁶ J. B. Priestley, 'Hugh Walpole', in *The English Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 7, Sep., 1928, pp. 529-536, National Council of Teachers of English, p. 529 at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/803829> [accessed 11/09/2019].

²⁷ Priestley, 'Hugh Walpole', p. 529. Cannan had suffered a debilitating mental breakdown in 1923.

took issue with James's endorsement of Edith Wharton over Joseph Conrad, a judgement marking Walpole's increasing independence of his mentor, and felt that James's complete failure to mention E. M. Forster showed that he was out of touch.²⁸ Forster had already laid his influence on the future of the novel before 1914, George Orwell describes him as 'essentially pre-war'.²⁹ Lawrence, as a 'creator of the future', seemed to suffer no destabilising of his career through the interruption caused by the War. In his preface to *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, Walpole calls Lawrence 'the one genius'.³⁰

In 1915 Walpole received another acknowledgement of the upward trajectory of his career, in the pages of H. G. Wells's novel *Boon*. The titular character in Wells's satire imagines a comedic train journey, in which the passengers are figures from the contemporary literary world. When Thomas Hardy, by choice or error, foregoes his first-class ticket for a seat in second-class, his place is taken by Hugh Walpole, who is provided with various luxury items, 'a beautiful fur rug [...] a gold-nibbed fountain pen', as well as 'innumerable introductions, and everything that a promising young novelist can need'.³¹ In this short passage, Wells contrasts a perception of Hardy as essentially unspoilt, despite his elevated status, with a mocking interpretation of Walpole's self-constructed image. With his conjunction of the two writers Wells also anticipates later flattering comparisons, in 1930 John Buchan would declare Walpole's *Rogue Herries* to be the best novel in English since Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895).³² *Boon* asserts Wells's belief that fiction should deal with real life, not 'leisure and cultivated people and books and shaded lamps' but 'whatever is in or whatever

²⁸ Walpole quoted in Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 113. Walpole's reference to the omission of Forster is perhaps the source of Elizabeth Steele's mistaken belief that James had actively disparaged Forster in his essay.

²⁹ George Orwell, *Inside the Whale* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986), p. 24. Subsequent references are to this edition.

³⁰ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. viii.

³¹ H. G. Wells, *Boon, The Mind of the Race, the Wild Asses of the Devil, and The Last Trump* (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1920), pp. 126-127. Subsequent references are to this title.

³² Hart-Davis, p. 312.

changes the mind of the race'.³³ Walpole's determination to document his own times acknowledges this impulse, although he would do so by combining realism with romance.

Walpole portrayed himself as a writer of modern romances, and it will be necessary to engage with his own definition of genre writing and its relationship with literary realism, as well as considering some wider definitions. The subjective nature of such definitions will become apparent. It is in the area of genre-writing that Walpole's reputation has enjoyed some slight revival of late, attracting the 'Gothic' epithet in descriptions of his work, and this at a time when that particular genre is receiving increasing academic attention. In the introduction to Valancourt Books' reissue of *The Killer and the Slain* (2014 [1942]), John Howard notes that Walpole's novels frequently conjure an 'enveloping gothic atmosphere of physical and psychological menace and dread'.³⁴ In examining Hugh Walpole's influences this study will provide a brief overview of fantastic fiction and ask if and where he might be placed within this tradition.

It is worth noting at the outset that Walpole would not have recognised the terms in which the Gothic is to be considered in Chapter Two of this study, as a fluid aesthetic or mode. While a keen reader of the original Gothic, Walpole decried its failure to blend the fantastic with a convincing realism, and dismissed the presentation of an absurd 'dream-like state'.³⁵ In her essay 'Gothic Romance' (1921), reviewing Edith Birkhead's *The Tale of Terror* (1921) for the *TLS*, Virginia Woolf famously had the tropes of gothic fiction confined to 'gibber in some dark cupboard of the servants' hall'.³⁶ Woolf did go on to agree with Birkhead that

³³ Wells, *Boon*, p. 158.

³⁴ John Howard, 'Introduction', in Hugh Walpole, *The Killer and the Slain* (Richmond, Valancourt Books, 2014), p. v. Subsequent references are to this edition.

³⁵ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, Walpole, 'After a Hundred Years' in *The Waverley Pageant* (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1932), pp. xxiv-xxv. Subsequent references are to this edition.

³⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'Gothic Romance', in *Granite and Rainbow* (London, The Hogarth Press, 1958), in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, Kindle Edition, Oregon Publishing, location: 66795 of 182519. Subsequent references refer to titles collected as part of this Kindle collection, except where otherwise indicated.

living authors would transform the tale of terror with ‘psychological enquiry’.³⁷ Despite his dismissal of the original Gothic, Walpole had been an avid reader, and happily described his own forays into genre as ‘macabres’ and ‘shockers’, this latter term a direct link with gothic street fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the so-called ‘blue books’, ‘shilling shockers’, and ‘penny bloods’.³⁸ Walpole now sought to embrace what he termed the ‘psychological-fantastic’, startling events set in a recognisable modern world, and with an added air of authenticity through an analysis of his characters’ mental landscape.³⁹ In his essay ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’ (1927, revised and expanded 1933-34), H. P. Lovecraft provides a definition of the psychological-fantastic, where weird events are presented naturally and convincingly because they are reinforced by an internal logic:

Technique, craftsmanship, experience, and psychological knowledge have advanced tremendously with the passing years, [...] with atmosphere cunningly adapted to the visualisation of a delicately exotic world of unreality beyond space and time, in which almost anything may happen if it but happen in true accord with certain types of imagination and illusion normal to the sensitive human brain.⁴⁰

Essential to an understanding of Hugh Walpole’s approach to romance fiction is his devotion to the work of Walter Scott, the author who transitioned the dream-like gothic into romantic-realism; Scott’s contribution will be considered in depth in Chapter Two. Walpole attributes a similar transition, occurring around the beginning of the twentieth-century, to the influence of Joseph Conrad.⁴¹ It is worth considering here the definitions that Walpole provided of romance and realism in his study *Joseph Conrad* from 1924, as in later critical writings and prefaces he would use the terms combatively. Even while acknowledging the

³⁷ Edith Birkhead, *The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance* (London, Constable & Company, 1921), p. 228. Subsequent references are to this title.

³⁸ See, Anthony Mandel and Catherine Spooner, ‘Gothic Fiction, from Shilling Shockers to Penny Bloods’, in *The Cambridge History of the Gothic*, Dale Townshend, and Angela Wright, (eds) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 139–161.

³⁹ Walpole, ‘Preface’, *Above the Dark Circus*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), pp. xi-xii. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴⁰ H. P. Lovecraft, ‘X. The Modern Masters’, in ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’, *The H. P. Lovecraft Archive*, web, unpaginated, at: <https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx> [accessed 09/10/2020]. Subsequent references are to this site.

⁴¹ Walpole, *Joseph Conrad* (New York, Haskell House, 1973), p. 110.

necessity of authenticating romance writing with a foundation of realism, ‘Realism’ itself becomes ‘an obnoxious word that came to us from heaven knows where’.⁴² In *Joseph Conrad*, Walpole challenges the stock definitions of Realism, as a photographic representation of life, and Romance, as an escapism which includes an escape from the literary creation of character. Instead, Walpole suggests that Realism perceives and records life with, ‘the rational faculties of observation, reason and reminiscence’, while Romance observes life while inspired by, ‘the faculties of imagination’.⁴³ Romance is not necessarily divorced from reality, only less disciplined; Realism is no less eloquent than Romance, but finds itself hamstrung by its adherence to certitude.⁴⁴ These definitions may not be as instructive as Walpole hopes, but he goes on to indicate how the French novel from the end of the nineteenth-century influenced the development of Realism in England, and the Russian novel, particularly Dostoevsky, influenced English Romance.⁴⁵ While for Walpole, Walter Scott is the first ‘English [sic] Romantic-Realist’, Conrad is important for using ‘romance realistically’ and for his creation of character.⁴⁶

There were two book-length studies of Hugh Walpole in his lifetime, *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* (1930) by Clemence Dane, and *Hugh Walpole: A Study* (1933) by Marguerite Steen. Written by personal friends of the author, both studies consider Walpole’s romantic influences and tend to the hagiographic. In 1939, two years before his death, Walpole was the subject of a Master of Arts thesis by Jessie Marion Porter of Boston University. The thesis considers Walpole’s formative influences, recognising the importance of personal experience in shaping his work. In 1952 Rupert Hart-Davis produced an authorised biography drawing heavily on Walpole’s journals and correspondence to integrate the life

⁴² Walpole, *The English Novel: Some Notes on its Evolution*, The Rede Lecture 1925 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1925), p.20.

⁴³ Walpole, *Joseph Conrad*, pp. 107-108.

⁴⁴ Walpole, *Joseph Conrad*, pp. 108-109.

⁴⁵ Walpole, *Joseph Conrad*, pp. 109-110.

⁴⁶ Walpole, *Joseph Conrad*, p. 111, & p.115.

with the work. The only truly comprehensive study of Walpole's literary output is Elizabeth Steele's *Hugh Walpole* (1972), which deals with the books under various headings designed to emphasise coherent themes. Steele followed up her earlier work with a second volume *Sir Hugh Walpole and the United States: A Novelist's View of 1919-1936 America* (2006), an exhaustively-researched study of Walpole's American lecture-tours and his brief career in Hollywood.

Steele's studies are both indispensable and problematic to the scholar following in her wake. Gratitude that she has provided a remarkable work of reference, providing a template for further study, is tempered by the worry that subsequent research is doomed to follow slavishly in her footsteps, forming the same conclusions, with little to offer in the way of new insights. Fortunately, Steele's value judgements on the relative merits of the works, and a certain dismissiveness about the genre titles, allows for some creative dissension from her opinions. Furthermore, Steele's decision to group the works under thematic headings considering Walpole as 'Acolyte', 'Artist', 'Witness', 'Evangelist', 'Critic', and 'Romanticist', diverges from Walpole's own presentation of the post-war novels as a representative project considering England in terms of the city of London, the provinces, and the countryside. This study will follow Walpole's scheme, so allowing for a different approach from Steele.

Another source, featured heavily in the early part of this thesis, is the work of Chris Baldick, in his studies of the modern movement and the wider literature of the 1920s. Baldick's assessment, that there was a lot more to the literature of this period than that represented by the modernist canon, is one of the themes of this study, and consequently it became inevitable that his scholarship be not only acknowledged but given a certain amount of precedence.

It is possible to consider Hugh Walpole in terms of various oppositions. Someone traumatised by his experience of childhood bullying, which fostered his belief in the reality of

diabolic evil, and as an individual prone to both hysterical rages and an enjoyment of malicious gossip. Someone who claimed to be intimidated by intellectuals but nevertheless pursued an intellectual lifestyle, collecting fine art, enjoying classical music and displaying an appreciation of intellectual literature, although his tastes in reading were broadly catholic. Appreciative of foreign literature he nevertheless considered its influence on English fiction to be at odds with an English tradition. Hugh Walpole was uncomfortable with literary theory, which he felt had exerted a detrimental influence on English fiction. Bullish in support of commercially successful writing he was still prey to value judgements with regard to some of his fellow popular authors.

For all the general sense of disillusionment and concern for the future that Walpole detected in the 1920s there was much for the writer to feel enthusiastic about, which goes some way to explain Walpole's embrace of a 'fantastic' period in his life.⁴⁷ The material circumstances of the writer of fiction had changed with the turn of the century, and there was a curious resemblance to an earlier transformative era, the development of the novel in the eighteenth-century, with rising literacy levels and the expansion of circulating libraries both driving and meeting the demand for new books. The Education Act of 1870 had begun a process of national mass education leading eventually to the provision of free education, compulsory in law, over the following three decades. Educational reform coincided with the industrialisation of the book publishing business, with mass production and increasing commercialisation. There was a parallel proliferation of newsprint and journals all requiring 'copy'. The American Copyright Act of 1891 had opened up a lucrative market for British writers in the USA, where they had previously lost out on royalty payments due to unlicensed reprints of popular works. Various copyright bills and Acts further established authors' rights throughout the British Empire in the early decades of the new century. With a growing

⁴⁷ Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. ix.

demand for fiction came the proliferation of circulating libraries which fed public requirements up to the later growth of free public libraries nationally. Eventually, economies of scale brought cheap editions of books within the purchasing power of a wider public. As the commercial prospects for writers widened, and the most successful authors became celebrities, literature became a commodity like any other.⁴⁸

One other event to transform the literary landscape going into the new century, had occurred in 1884, when in a lecture to the Royal Institution Walter Besant brought the novel in English late to the table of literary theory, by suggesting that fiction might be considered one of the Fine Arts, comparable with painting, sculpture, poetry, and music.⁴⁹ A reply to Besant in an article by Henry James, and a response to both from Robert Louis Stevenson in his ‘A Humble Remonstrance’, further debated the motion. Besant’s treatise veers between celebrating the ‘art’ in the art of fiction as an expression of human creative achievement, and an ‘art’ in terms of a technique or set of precepts that could be learned. His argument for a set of laws governing the writing of fiction favours the author confining themselves to exploring lived experience and observation, he stresses the need for realism, and he offers the suggestion that a conscious moral purpose is so much a part of English life that it is ‘practically a law of English Fiction’.⁵⁰ In his response to Besant, Henry James noted that the English novel had only recently become a subject worthy of discussion, and that while its only requirement was that it should be interesting, the only reason for its existence was that it should compete with life. While James takes slight exception to Besant by pointing out that ‘reality’ can take many forms, he emphasises the need for the novel to have an air of reality

⁴⁸ Patrick Parrinder and Andrezej Gasiorek, eds., *The Reinvention of the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3-180.

⁴⁹ Walter Besant, ‘The Art of Fiction’, in *Walter Besant and Henry James, The Art of Fiction* (Boston, Cupples and Hurd, 1884), p. 3, at the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/cu31924027192941> [accessed 05/05/2019]. Subsequent references to this title and site.

⁵⁰ Besant, ‘The Art of Fiction’, in *Walter Besant and Henry James, The Art of Fiction*, p. 29 [accessed 07/05/2019].

and the illusion of life, he is unhappy with authors who concede the artificiality of their creation. He disputes that any distinction exists between the novel and the romance, that is the novel of character and the novel of incident, except where such a distinction arises in the standard of execution. James further declares that such a distinction is made by critics and readers for their convenience, arguably it is a distinction perpetuated by publishers also for their convenience. Besant refers to the modern English novel, and James asking what this means argues that writers paint a picture of their own language and time. James seems to steer clear of making value judgements with regard to literature, being unhappy with the view that people ought to like or dislike certain sorts of fiction, and he also emphasises that the province of the novel is all of life and experience, a view that would be reiterated by H. G. Wells in a talk to *The Times* Book Club around 1911.⁵¹

In his 'A Humble Remonstrance', Stevenson emphasised that fiction was not and never could be like life, the latter being 'monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant', while a work of fiction is clearly a piece of design, or should be.⁵² Stevenson also emphasised the clear distinctions between novels of character and novels of incident

First each novel, and then each class of novels, exists by and for itself. I will take, for instance, three main classes, which are fairly distinct: first, the novel of adventure, which appeals to certain almost sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man; second, the novel of character, which appeals to our intellectual appreciation of man's foibles and mingled and inconstant motives; and third, the dramatic novel, which deals with the same stuff as the serious theatre, and appeals to our emotional nature and moral judgment.⁵³

The first section of this study presents a contextual background to Walpole's writing career, first by examining literary modernism, which dominates academic attention to the period, then by looking at the romantic tradition to which Walpole claims allegiance. Literary trends

⁵¹ Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', in *Walter Besant and Henry James, The Art of Fiction*, pp. 51-85 [accessed 07/05/2019].

⁵² Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', in *Memories and Portraits* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1919), p.285.

⁵³ Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', in *Memories and Portraits*, p. 286.

were of course only a part of what Peter Nicholls has called ‘a highly complex sat of cultural developments at the beginning of the twentieth century’.⁵⁴ Interesting as developments were in art, design, music, and theatre, not to mention science and politics, this study must confine itself to literary modernism as the particular, if retrospectively realised, landscape against which Hugh Walpole’s career played out.

The second section of the study looks at Walpole’s social histories of his own period, post-First World War, and his genre writing. The third section examines Walpole’s embrace of historical fiction, with which he hoped to establish his literary reputation. Finally, Walpole’s involvement in a minor literary scandal is examined alongside his provincial novels, his use of a narrative voice, and his optimistic prediction of a new Britain made during the early years of the Second World War. Much of Walpole’s prodigious output has had to be ignored, despite being of interest in and of itself, in order to focus upon the main themes of this study; where appropriate, reference has been made to direct attention to those titles thus neglected.

Having analysed through close reading Walpole’s fictional texts, and his various critical commentaries, this study should in conclusion be able to examine whether Walpole achieved his literary objectives, and whether he was a romantic outsider at odds with both his temperamental and temporal generations, or a representative of an alternative strain in modern fiction, neglected through the emphasis imposed by the canon of periodisation.

⁵⁴ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1995), p. vii.

PART ONE
Contextual Background
Chapter One: This is the Modern World

The Introduction to this study noted that in 1926 Hugh Walpole expressed his intention to create novels following the main tradition of the English novel, while displaying an awareness of modern technique and modern psychology. Walpole's definition of this 'main tradition' was a 'loose, narrative, colloquial' technique, exemplified in his view by Henry Fielding, Walter Scott, and William Makepeace Thackeray.¹ Walpole's reference to modern psychology acknowledges a new influence on the modern movement: in 1924 Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press had taken over publication of the papers of the International Psycho-Analytical Institute, publishing Sigmund Freud, and making psychoanalytical theory available in English for the first time.² Walpole's statement also suggests he is bidding to be considered a 'serious' or even an 'important' writer. Walpole was already commercially successful at this point, but here he is positioning himself as a bridge between traditional English prose and the modern techniques and concerns that were transforming literature. While emphasising a belief in the continuity of English prose, Walpole is aiming to forge a literature of transition in a transitional period.

Walpole considered the effect upon the young novelists who had started out like him around 1908, witnessing the social and political upheavals caused by the Boer War of 1899-1902, and then experiencing the greater turmoil of the First World War. Using imagery suggestive of the displaced persons affected by conflict, he writes that those writers who emerged in 1920, after the hostilities were over, found themselves 'belonging to no world, too young to

¹ Walpole, 'A Foreword', *The Herries Chronicle* (London, The Reprint Society, 1939), p. vii. Subsequent references are to this edition.

² Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers; Vols. I-IV* (London, Hogarth Press, 1924-5). See also The Hogarth Press, Archives of The Hogarth Press, 1917-1955. University of Reading Special Collections Services. GB 6 RUL MS 2750, and Archives Hub website, <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb6-rulms2750> [accessed 30/09/2019].

be truly Edwardian, too old to be creators of the future'.³ In a letter of 1916 to Frank Swinnerton, Walpole notes how the War has overshadowed his total absorption in art, and that, with the twilight of the writers Henry James, George Bernard Shaw, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, 'the gate is slammed upon a period'.⁴ Walpole the writer is born into one era, experiences a cultural hiatus and emerges not into a new world as such but a destabilising liminal period of uncertainty.

Walpole's retrospective analysis of the literary world of England in the 1920s, presents the view that the door had closed upon a generation of Victorian novelists, whose work appeared anachronistic alongside the 'creators of the future', while adding the observation that a third group, straddling the eras, found themselves in literary limbo. Apart from the latter consideration, this evocation of post-war literary England conforms to a conveniently demarcated periodisation of literature into movements, a reading which Walpole's qualifying clause then goes on to question. While it is convenient for periodisation to emphasise the existence of strict demarcation lines within literature, in reality boundaries were probably more fluid. To understand Hugh Walpole's position within the literary milieu this chapter will provide a contextual background.

Small world

The literary historian Chris Baldick, in order to emphasise the small world of literary society in the 1920s, reproduces an entry from Arnold Bennett's journal of 1919 in which the writer notes attending a dinner at Osbert Sitwell's. Sitwell's dinner guests included the poet W. H. Davies, Lytton Strachey, Leonard Woolf, the war poet Robert Nichols, Siegfried Sassoon,

³ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

⁴ Frank Swinnerton, *Figures in the Foreground* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p. 46. Subsequent references to Swinnerton are to this title.

Aldous Huxley, the poet W. J. Turner, and Herbert Read.⁵ Baldick has stressed that this kind of literary inter-mingling was inevitable, despite the formation of like-minded groups and promulgation of movements elsewhere. It has become convenient to consider this period of literary history in the terms set by what has become the dominant movement, those groups gathered by and around Ezra Pound, and famously in Bloomsbury. Stanley Sultan in *Eliot, Joyce and Company* (1990), offers a definition of artistic trends:

A movement can undermine a period, supplanting it with another because [...] unlike a *school*, or group of artists who evolve and follow a special fashion that does not violate the character of a period, a *movement* is a consensus of artists – and their allies – who work, some of them independently and even in isolation, some without conscious intention, to effect a fundamental change in the established conception of their particular genre of art, and conception of reality insofar as that genre engages reality.⁶

Sultan's definition of a movement admirably encompasses the shifting affiliations and different personalities of literary modernism.

Sultan examines some of the, largely semantic, objections to the term 'modernism', and the conflicting opinions as to its provenance, and consequently indicates that the term itself and the concept of it as a movement only truly gained currency in the 1970s.⁷ Rather than adumbrating that debate here it seems sufficient to accept the fact of literary modernism as the primary location of this study while charting a variety of critical qualifications. In his study of literature in the 1920s, Chris Baldick acknowledges 'the ascendancy of Modernism in academic literary studies since the 1970s', and its swamping of other tools of reference by the 'habitual substitution of a movement—and for all its undoubted importance, a minority movement – for a chronological period in the terminology of early twentieth-century literary

⁵ Chris Baldick, *1910-1940: The Modern Movement* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 50-51. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁶ Stanley Sultan, *Eliot, Joyce and Company* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), p.92. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁷ Sultan, pp.91-101.

history'.⁸ Elsewhere he warns of writers being 'swallowed into an expanded modernist canon' and the 'undeclared assumption that other writers are worthy of notice only insofar as they resemble that central avant-garde'.⁹ With deference to Baldick, it seems inevitable that modernism be used as a focal point, to examine the varieties of literary output and critical opinion, within what was a time of drastic social and cultural change. It should also still be possible to acknowledge the existence of a wider popular literature. The interest in Hugh Walpole for the purposes of this study is as an antithetical voice, offering opposition to modernism while apparently attempting to accommodate its influence within his own work.

As seen in *Sultan*, the term 'modernism' and its concept as a movement may not have gained traction until the 1970s, but in his own fiction and *belles lettres* Hugh Walpole's frequent references to the 'modern novel' and its purveyors, encompass that entire milieu, often with satirical intent. *Sultan*, in his definitions, refers to the fundamental change in conception underpinning the direction of a movement, and perhaps the defining trait of modernism is the sense that it represented a break with the past, a mood exemplified in two famous and oft-quoted extracts from Virginia Woolf. In her essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' of 1924, Woolf declared that 'on or about December 1910 human character changed' before going on to identify the altered behaviour of her domestic servants.¹⁰ More pertinently she had arranged 'Edwardians and Georgians into two camps; Mr Wells, Mr Bennett, and Mr Galsworthy [...] the Edwardians; Mr Forster, Mr Lawrence, Mr Strachey, Mr Joyce and Mr Eliot [...] the Georgians'.¹¹ Already the latter group, displaying quite disparate talents and attitudes, have been rallied under a flag of convenience, one that is still hoisted above

⁸ Chris Baldick, *Literature of the 1920s: Writers among the Ruins* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012) p.1. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹ Baldick, *1910-1940: The Modern Movement*, pp.398-399.

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays* (London, The Hogarth Press, 1950), in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, location: 57916 of 182519.

¹¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, in *Virginia Woolf the Complete Collection*, location: 57909 of 182519.

academic syllabuses today. Woolf addressed herself to this break with the past once again in her essay 'How It Strikes a Contemporary' in 1925.

We are sharply cut off from our predecessors. A shift in the scale—the sudden slip of masses held in position for ages—has shaken the fabric from top to bottom, alienated us from the past and made us perhaps too vividly conscious of the present. Every day we find ourselves doing, saying, or thinking things that would have been impossible to our fathers. And we feel the differences which have not been noted far more keenly than the resemblances which have been very perfectly expressed. New books lure us to read them partly in the hope that they will reflect this re-arrangement of our attitude—these scenes, thoughts, and apparently fortuitous groupings of incongruous things which impinge upon us with so keen a sense of novelty—and, as literature does, give it back into our keeping, whole and comprehended. Here indeed there is every reason for optimism. No age can have been more rich than ours in writers determined to give expression to the differences which separate them from the past and not to the resemblances which connect them with it.¹²

While not being in the nature of a manifesto, this contemporary view is explicit in its identification of the gap between tradition and modernity. However, Chris Baldick has pointed out that Woolf takes care to acknowledge 'the resemblances' and, 'a certain partiality, a distortion of perspective in which real continuities are overlooked amid the celebration of novelty and originality'.¹³ In his wider discussion of theories surrounding modernism's possible debt to Romanticism, Stanley Sultan summarises this shift as a respect for tradition coupled with a rejection of convention. In one of several neat definitions Sultan posits modernism as both an expression of the *zeitgeist* and the means used of expressing it. 'Innovations in "way of writing" [...] including the structural use of myths and earlier works; authorial concealment, idiolectic effects, and other strategies for creating an "autonomous object" or "heterocosm"; parsimony; complex tone and texture'.¹⁴ Sultan indicates that the 'emphasis on portraying consciousness' was instrumental in the objectifying of modernist narratives, but he is also careful to indicate the traditions such experimentation grew out of,

¹² Virginia Woolf, 'How It Strikes a Contemporary' in *The Common Reader* (London, Hogarth Press, 1925), in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, location: 21269-21276 of 182519.

¹³ Baldick, *1910-1940: The Modern Movement*, pp.2-3.

¹⁴ Sultan, p.92.

as they ‘both assaulted conventions, and assimilated tradition’.¹⁵ Chris Baldick sees modernist writers seeking out ‘alternative traditions from which to work in new conditions’ and this can be compared with Stanley Sultan’s view of traditions being assimilated and conventions being challenged.¹⁶

Experimenting with tradition

In 1929, in a series of lectures delivered at the City Literary Institute in London a group of writers including Edmund Blunden, Edith Sitwell, and T. S. Eliot emphasised the notion that experimentation was itself part of literary tradition and that no experimentation was possible without some foundation in, and familiarity with, tradition. To anticipate slightly, Clemence Dane hails Hugh Walpole as being a ‘traditive’ writer (her own construction), one who is able to experiment within a recognition of tradition.¹⁷ While this would appear to give him some affinity with the modernists, Walpole drew upon a tradition of romance writing, and a literary sensibility that appears derived from the Romantic movement, a tradition rejected by Eliot in particular whose Classicism, influenced by T. E. Hulme, was argued in the essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’.¹⁸ T. E. Hulme in his book *Speculations* (1924) offered a simple definition of Romanticism and Classicism: Romantics saw man, the individual, ‘as an infinite reservoir of possibilities’ constrained by rules which, if removed, would enable him and society to progress, Classicism holds the view that man is limited, and with a constant nature which can only develop through organisation and adherence to tradition.¹⁹ Hulme’s wider arguments do not have the scientific reasoning he likes to suggest, given his implacable

¹⁵ Sultan, pp.94-95.

¹⁶ Baldick, *Literature of the 1920s*, p.25.

¹⁷ Clemence Dane, *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* (London, Heinemann, 1930), p.13-14. Subsequent references to Dane are to this title.

¹⁸ T. S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London, Methuen, 1957).

¹⁹ T. E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, Herbert Read ed. (London, Kegan Paul, 1924), p. 116.

support for what he claims are absolutes, an acceptance of the existence of the deity and a belief in the concept of original sin, but his definition is still useful.²⁰

Where Virginia Woolf had laid out lines of demarcation, subsequent commentators improvised around her original theme. In 1938 in *Enemies of Promise* Cyril Connolly suggested that there were ‘Mandarins’, Woolf herself, Marcel Proust, Aldous Huxley, and Lytton Strachey, and ‘realists’, writers working in a ‘new vernacular’, such as Somerset Maugham, Ernest Hemingway, Christopher Isherwood and George Orwell.²¹ In 1963, Stephen Spender in *The Struggle of the Modern* designated ‘contemporaries’ and ‘moderns’, ‘recognisers’ and ‘non-recognisers’:

I see the ‘moderns’ and the ‘recognisers’ as deliberately setting out to invent a new literature as the result of their feeling that our age is in many respects unprecedented, and outside all the conventions of past literature and art. I see the ‘contemporaries’ and the ‘non-recognisers’ as being at least partly aware of the claim that there is a modern situation. Yet they refuse to regard it as a problem special to art.²²

What Spender echoed, some forty years after Virginia Woolf, was how important it was to recognise that, particularly after the Great War, things had changed, politically, socially, and culturally.²³

The break with the past sometimes manifested itself as an inter-generational rift, although this was more complicated in practice than a simple tension between old and young, and youth’s traditional rejection of the values of their forbears. There was, following the First World War, a sense that the older generation, the generation too old for active service, had betrayed the young by pitching them headlong into the conflict. This view surfaces in Wilfred Owen’s posthumously published poem ‘The Parable of the Old Man and the Young’,

²⁰ Hulme, *Speculations*, pp. 117-118.

²¹ Cyril Connolly, ‘The New Mandarins’, and ‘The New Vernacular’, in *Enemies of Promise* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), pp. 45-72.

²² Stephen Spender, *The Struggle of the Modern* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1963), p. x.

²³ See National Archive: ‘Twenties Britain: Decade of conflict, realignment and change?’; ‘Introduction’ by Keith Layburn, at <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/twenties-britain-part-one/> and <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/twenties-britain-part-two/> [accessed 28/07/2020].

in which Owen recasts, with a grimmer outcome, the Bible story of Abraham, wherein the prophet was called upon to sacrifice his son Isaac before a last-minute reprieve saved the child; Owen's new version suggesting that a gerontocracy had sacrificed the young men of Europe.²⁴ Hugh Walpole, in his novel *The Inquisitor* (1935), has the teenage Penny Marlowe consider the previous generation, as depicted in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and Richard Aldington, as 'old muddlers responsible for the War and all the other horrors of modern civilisation'.²⁵ This view, that the intransigent patriotism of the old, and their incompetent management of the recent war, had led to the sacrifice of youth, is recalled by George Orwell writing in *The Road to Wigan Pier* in 1937. Orwell notes a post-war 'wave of revolutionary feeling', and a passion for bolshevism in its colloquial sense, the 'revolt of youth against age', and the resultant 'curious cult of hatred of 'old men''.²⁶ In literary terms, and at a somewhat lower temperature, Virginia Woolf and her contemporaries rejected what they saw as the materialism of the older generation exemplified by H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy. However, the mathematics of this notion of inter-generational conflict in the literary world requires closer scrutiny, as age is hardly the only determinant of where individual writers stood.

Hugh Walpole's position was interesting in that his literary peer group, the practitioners of the well-plotted novel like Arnold Bennett and Somerset Maugham, whom he sometimes refers to as his contemporaries, were quite different, and older, than his actual contemporaries like Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot who were moderns; hence Steele's reference to traditional and temporal generations. In 1931, in his journal, Walpole compares the support he got from 'the younger generation', writers like J. B. Priestley, Marguerite Steen, and L. A. G. Strong,

²⁴ Wilfred Owen, 'The Parable of the Old Men and the Young', in *The Works of Wilfred Owen* (Ware, Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 15.

²⁵ Walpole, *The Inquisitor* (London, Macmillan, 1938), p. 225. Subsequent references are to this edition.

²⁶ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London, Penguin Books, 1989), p.129. Subsequent references are to this edition.

with the criticism from his ‘traditional’ generation of Arnold Bennett, Frank Swinnerton and Somerset Maugham; Walpole asserts that he is ‘Romantic’, and it is his affinity with ‘Romanticism’ that sets him apart.²⁷ Walpole is somewhat selective in assessing the support he did receive, making no distinction between young writers like Priestley, Steen and Strong, to whom he was close, and the younger generation of modernists, who like his ‘traditional’ generation were largely antipathetic. Walpole isolates himself further by stating, ‘I am Romantic and [my] whole generation has been against Romanticism’, a rather dramatic statement which he would return to again and again, in a self-conscious depiction of himself as an unfashionable outsider.²⁸ Walpole may not have been as isolated as he thought, modernism itself might be a stage in the evolution of a culturally assimilated Romanticism; just how ‘new’ modernism was, and the actual extent to which it was home-grown or imported has been variously challenged.

Cultural origins

In 1970 Bernard Bergonzi could write that the lasting effects of modernism on English cultural life were less than had been up to then supposed, and that its main creative phase had been concluded by 1930. Bergonzi was considering modernism in terms of a corresponding continental radicalism and revolution, and concluded that its predominantly foreign or Celtic cultivators did not find ‘the essentially conservative and innocent nature of English cultural life’ to be as fertile soil as it was to more indigenous growths, hence the ultimate emigration of various figures in the movement, as ‘English literature remains, at heart, literary’.²⁹

In *The Myth of the Modern* (1987) Perry Meisel sees ‘English literary history as a sequence of three modernisms – the Renaissance, Romanticism, and High Modernism proper’, for him

²⁷ Steele, p.20.

²⁸ Steele, pp.20-21.

²⁹ Bernard Bergonzi, ‘The Advent of Modernism 1900-1920’, in *The Twentieth Century*, Bernard Bergonzi, ed. (London, Sphere, 1970), pp.44-45.

T. S. Eliot's neo-Classicism and anti-Romanticism becomes a detour or obfuscation on an otherwise clear path.³⁰ Recent scholarship reinforces English modernism as a development of what has gone before, as Vincent Sherry in *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2014), and Kristin Mahoney in *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (2015), both see the aesthetics of modernism being shaped by the Decadent Movement.³¹

Another writer unconvinced by the narrow nationalistic definition of English Letters and arguing for its supplanting by 'the supranational movement called International Modernism' is Hugh Kenner, who points out that while International Modernism used the English tongue 'none of its canonical works came out of either England or any mind formed there'.³² In our own era of transnational critical discourse this seems less of an issue than it apparently was to Kenner writing in the 1980s.³³ In any event the same observation was made by George Orwell in 1940, when he wrote that the best writers of the 1920s, bar D. H. Lawrence, were not Englishmen. Orwell claimed that most of the great writers of the 1920s with their 'varied origins' had avoided the 'ordinary English educational mill', and 'had at some time to struggle against poverty, neglect and even downright persecution, while the majority of the thirties group 'fit easily into the public-school-university-Bloomsbury pattern'.³⁴ Orwell's more negative remarks have to be taken in the context of his apparent impatience with the W. H. Auden grouping of the 1930s and their 'Boy Scout' Marxism; just as Kenner's downplaying of the influence of English Letters, indicates his eagerness to uphold the North

³⁰ Perry Meisel *The Myth of the Modern: A Study in British Literature and Criticism after 1850* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987).

³¹ Vincent Sherry, *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), and Kristin Mahoney, *Literature and the Politics of Post-Victorian Decadence* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015). For a review and discussion of these titles see Kate Hext, 'Moderns and the Mood: How Decadence in literature survived the fall of Wilde and the disfavour of the TLS', in *Times Literary Supplement*, February 5, 2016, no. 5888 (London, Times Literary Supplement Limited, 2016), pp. 3-5.

³² Hugh Kenner, 'The Making of the Modernist Canon', *Chicago Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Spring 1984), pp.51-53, at <http://www.jstor.org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/25305247> [accessed 19/04/2014].

³³ For a wider discussion of transnational modernism see Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA*, May, 2008, Vol. 123, No. 3, pp. 737-748 (Modern Language Association), at: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/25501895> [accessed 06/09/2020].

³⁴ Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p 31.

American and Celtic origins of modernist writers in general, and the influence of Ezra Pound on the movement in particular. Kenner's viewpoint also highlights that same infertile English literary soil that Bergonzi identified, which saw modernist innovators like Pound and James Joyce move to the continent.

T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis, in Lewis's own phrase, heavy with *machismo*, 'The Men of 1914', had laid the cornerstones of literary modernism in England, as innovative practitioners and critics, attempting 'to get away from romantic art into classical art, away from political propaganda back into the detachment of true literature'.³⁵ The movement itself is generally taken as lasting from the late-nineteenth century to the beginning of the Second World War, with 'High' modernism occupying the period 1910-1930, or 1910-1939, depending upon the critics' preference and the net in which they wish to capture particular writers; although advocates of 'Late' modernism see the movement rumbling on into the mid-sixties. Some critics, like Malcolm Bradbury, see modernism already in its terminal or transitional phase in the 1920s, facing a redistribution of its forces, evidence of a lasting cultural heritage in 'an era that turns us over into our kind of artistic milieu'.³⁶

After the Great War, came a period of adjustment and reflection; Bradbury's transitional phase perhaps, in a decade conspicuous for its self-scrutiny. From the vantage point of 1940 George Orwell, writing in *Inside the Whale*, could reflect upon the literary landscape of the 1920s and its changing climate. Orwell stated that readers of the literary journals of the mid-to-late-1920s might not grasp that Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Aldous Huxley and Lytton Strachey, represented a 'movement', because the literary papers did not reflect the coming trend. He saw E. M. Forster as 'essentially pre-war', W. B. Yeats as not

³⁵ Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London, Calder and Boyars, 1967), p. 250.

³⁶ Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Novel in the 1920s', in *The Twentieth Century*, p.181.

belonging to the twenties, and George Moore, Joseph Conrad, Arnold Bennett and H. G.

Wells as having already ‘shot their bolt before the war ever happened’:

Even more than at most times the big shots of literary journalism were busy pretending that the age-before-last had not come to an end. Squire ruled the *London Mercury*, Gibbs and Walpole were the gods of the lending libraries, there was a cult of cheeriness and manliness, beer and cricket, briar pipes and monogamy, and it was at all times possible to earn a few guineas by writing an article denouncing ‘high-brows’. But all the same it was the despised highbrows who had captured the young. The wind was blowing from Europe, and long before 1930 it had blown the beer-and-cricket school naked, except for their knighthoods.³⁷

These observations are enlightening for the way they both illuminate, and offer a challenge to, the received wisdom of the literary scene of the 1920s and the role of modernism within it. Orwell acknowledges a core personnel representing the ‘modern movement’; notably bereft, for whatever reason of Orwell’s own, of a female contingent. He asserts that it was possible to peruse the contemporary literary papers without grasping that this movement actually existed. He dismisses the literary establishment of the time as already being on its way out, but acknowledges that popular ‘middlebrow’ authors such as Phillip Gibbs and Hugh Walpole still held, however temporarily, the public’s attention.³⁸ Finally, alluding to the changing aspirations of a post-First World War generation, he heralds the advent of a disruptive modernism with its source in a European avant-garde. From the tone of the piece Gibbs and Walpole are presented as tweedy pipe-smoking old men, Edwardians, unaware they are becoming culturally redundant. While Gibbs was certainly in middle-age by the 1920s, Walpole, born in 1884, was still a relatively young man, and a ‘god of the lending library’, in Orwell’s phrase, largely through his industry and the rapidly-rising trajectory of his writing career.

³⁷ Orwell, *Inside the Whale*, pp.24-25.

³⁸ ‘Middlebrow’ was a term for those whose cultural pretensions placed them between the intellectual ‘highbrow’, and the ‘lowbrow’ consumer of popular culture. Despite its original pejorative coinage, the term would come to be embraced by writers such as Hugh Walpole and J. B. Priestley. See “middlebrow, n. and adj.”. *OED Online*. September 2020. Oxford University Press, at: <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/252048?redirectedFrom=middlebrow&> [accessed 23/09/2020].

Given Orwell's painting of a clubbable English establishment, and various commentators' view of a disconnect between a Euro-centric modernism and its English manifestation that would fail to take root, it is worth reading Jean Paul Sartre from *What is Literature?* (1948, [English translation 1950]). Sartre sees English intellectuals as an eccentric caste, separate from wider society and lacking the influence of their French counterparts who drove the Revolution of 1789. Sartre writes about London 'club life' where the writers' talk is of 'business, politics, women, or horses, never about literature', and how they claim that their isolation arises from personal choice and not as a result of the structure of English society.³⁹ In 1941, seven years before Sartre's published comments, Walpole would write of the unhypocritical 'Philistinism' of the British, resulting in a lack of State-aid for the Arts, and the half-ashamed patronage of its patrons, which would seem to endorse Sartre's view.⁴⁰

Here is Hugh Walpole's own view on the literary scene of the 1920s, expressed through one of his fictions *The Young Enchanted* (1923):

Literary parties were curious affairs in 1920; they shared the strange general character of that year in their confusion and formlessness. It was a fact at that time in London there was not a single critical figure who commanded general respect. No school of criticism carried any authority outside its immediate following – not one man nor woman alive in Great Britain at that moment, not one literary journal, weekly, monthly, or daily, carried enough weight behind its literary judgements to shift for a moment the success or failure of a book or a personality. [...] All this was nobody's fault – it was the note of a period that was far stronger in its character than any single human being in it.⁴¹

For Walpole, the period has a 'character', but no one individual has emerged to put a stamp upon it. Some hundred years after 'The Men of 1914' the period 1910 to 1939 is now singularly defined as being the 'High' point of the modern movement. With the passage of time the era has acquired both a character, and a catalogue of personalities that both define it and are defined by it. In 1961, R. C. Churchill, while acknowledging the importance of other

³⁹ Jean Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London, Methuen & Co., 1986), p. 124.

⁴⁰ Walpole, *Open Letter of an Optimist*, Macmillan War Pamphlets No. 9 (London, Macmillan, 1941), pp. 19-20. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴¹ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p.203.

figures, named the period 1920-1960 as 'The Age of T. S. Eliot', and identified Eliot himself as 'the foremost living English writer: [...] our greatest poet since W. B. Yeats, our greatest critic since Matthew Arnold'.⁴² Churchill expressed caution regarding the judgement of subsequent generations, but with Eliot as its figurehead the study of literary modernism has survived and prospered for some fifty years.

It is possible to say that the modernist grouping of the 1930s was more clearly defined than that of the 1920s; Orwell lumps them together by 'tendency', suggesting that the writers of the 1920s were more concerned with technique, while the Auden-Spender group of the 1930s have 'gone into politics' and have a 'serious purpose'.⁴³ Chris Baldick suggests that the 1930s has 'its own distinct cultural and literary agenda' while the preceding decade has become 'invisible' in terms of British literary history, 'curiously suspended so as not to impede the procession of modernism'; he does not deprecate the quality of literary output in the 1920s, rather he emphasises a general lack of cohesion arising 'from the configuration of the decade's literary scene itself'.⁴⁴ As in the 'literary party' extract from Hugh Walpole's *The Young Enchanted*, there is no outstanding single figure and no collective voice. Baldick acknowledges Eliot's status but emphasises the latter's debt to Pound, who had departed for Paris in 1921 and no longer managed his protégé's career.⁴⁵ The 1920s' literary scene, like the wider cultural and social scene, was freighted with post-war baggage: inter-generational strife, disillusionment, and an attempt to make sense of recent history which forestalled a direct engagement with contemporaneity. In 1925 Virginia Woolf cites a lack of belief and conviction in the literary milieu when compared with writers of previous eras, and somewhat echoes Walpole from two years previously in her summation of the literary scene:

⁴² R. C. Churchill, 'The Age of T S Eliot', Ch. XV, in George Sampson, *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965), p.944.

⁴³ Orwell, *Inside the Whale*, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁴ Baldick, *Literature of the 1920s*, p. 1-2.

⁴⁵ Baldick, *Literature of the 1920s*, p. 1-2.

There is no name which dominates the rest. There is no master in whose workshop the young are proud to serve apprenticeship. [...]. As for the rest, though they are many and vigorous and in the full flood of creative activity, there is none whose influence can seriously affect his contemporaries, or penetrate beyond our day to that not very distant future which it pleases us to call immortality. If we make a century our test, and ask how much of the work produced in these days in England will be in existence then, we shall have to answer not merely that we cannot agree upon the same book, but that we are more than doubtful whether such a book there is. It is an age of fragments.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, from such literary fragments a canon emerged. By the time of Woolf's essay, several important modernist texts had already appeared: *Women in Love* in 1920, *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* in 1922, *A Passage to India* in 1924, and Woolf's own *Mrs Dalloway* in 1925. Beyond a certain cultural notoriety however, were these works having any wider impact? A glance at the bestseller lists for the decade indicate that of the names associated with modernism only Lytton Strachey translated controversy into significant sales, with his biographies of *Queen Victoria* (1921) and *Elizabeth and Essex* (1928).⁴⁷ Marie Corelli, Ethel M. Dell, Hall Caine, Charles Garvice, Florence Barclay, Warwick Deeping and Elinor Glyn, were writers popular with the general public, enjoying book sales in the millions.⁴⁸ These novelists' sales may have drawn an admixture of scorn and fascination from 'serious' writers with their eyes on posterity, in any event, as Mark Morrisson points out, whether 'awed by the money-making potential and the possibility of reaching staggeringly large audiences', or concerned by cultural contamination, modernists became drawn into mass market print culture.⁴⁹

In her essay 'Modern Fiction', published in 1921, Virginia Woolf wrote: 'It is for the historian of literature to decide; for him to say if we are now beginning or ending or standing

⁴⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'How It Strikes a Contemporary' in *The Common Reader*, in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, location: 21241-21248 of 182519.

⁴⁷ Daniel Immerwahr, compiler, 'The Books of the Century', 1920-1929, at <http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~immer/books1920s> [accessed 17/04/2014].

⁴⁸ Jonathan Rose, 'Modernity and Print I: Britain 1890-1970' in, Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose, eds., *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp.349-350.

⁴⁹ Mark S Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception, 1905-1920* (Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), pp.22-23. Subsequent references are to this edition.

in the middle of a great period of prose fiction, for down in the middle little is visible'.⁵⁰ The observation comes early in one of Woolf's broadsides against the work of H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, whom she damns with faint praise, while applauding Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad, and James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* (1922) was being serialised in the *Little Review* at the time. Woolf's expression of uncertainty at the judgement of posterity had modified somewhat by 1924, when she was prepared to commit to 'a surpassingly rash prediction – we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages in English literature'.⁵¹ While the break with the past had been acknowledged, the self-appointed task of setting a new literary standard was to be claimed by an emergent cultural elite.

War of the brows

As a counter to cultural elites, here is middlebrow novelist Amos Campbell, a character in Hugh Walpole's *The Young Enchanted* (1921): 'What do you people know about anything save literary values? – and over them you squabble all the while. There aren't any literary values until Time has spoken'.⁵² This quotation is drawn from a scene in which Campbell, a self-mocking portrait of Walpole himself, attacks a triumvirate of Bloomsbury 'moderns'. Campbell rails against the group's 'over-sophisticated, over-read, over-intellectual standard' and the separation of 'Life from Art', something that clearly concerns Virginia Woolf in 'Modern Fiction'.⁵³ Campbell/Walpole makes a call for inclusivity and less solemnity, while

⁵⁰ Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' in *The Common Reader*, in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, location: 20072 of 182519.

⁵¹ Virginia Woolf 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' in *The Captain's Death Bed, and other essays*, in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, location: 58197 of 182519.

⁵² Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, pp. 209.

⁵³ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, pp. 207-209.

his opponents are attempting to establish ‘some kind of a literary standard’; through a literary alter-ego Walpole is already challenging what he sees as modernist exclusivity and elitism.⁵⁴

Q. D. Leavis writing in 1932 singled out the same passage from Walpole after alerting her readers to the ‘faked sensibility’ of middlebrow fiction and its authors, whose works betray ‘a lack of discrimination and the functioning of a second-rate mind’.⁵⁵ An enemy of inclusivity, Leavis seems to reserve especial stores of spleen for the middlebrow author (Walpole figures frequently), even over the best-seller. Virginia Woolf in ‘Middlebrow’, a posthumously published letter to the *New Statesman*, written in 1932 but never sent, is equally disparaging, seeing more in common between the ‘Highbrow’ and the ‘Lowbrow’; a variation on the conceit that there is a natural affinity between aristocracy and proletariat and it is the bourgeoisie that do not fit in.⁵⁶ The concern of Q. D. Leavis is that the ‘temper of the age’ is such ‘that the principal endeavour of the popular contemporary novelists [...] is to persuade the ordinary prosperous citizen that life is fun [...], and there are no standards in life or art other than his own’.⁵⁷ We may find, as do Melissa Sullivan and Sophie Blanch, some of Leavis’s arguments to be ‘bombastic and hyperbolic’.⁵⁸ However, if she fails in her avowed attempt to avoid value judgements, and if her hymn to an imagined Arcadia of previous centuries is implausible, her commentary nevertheless acknowledges (as it deplores) the cultural and social changes that had occurred post-war. W. H. Auden in 1938, in his Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*, reiterated Leavis’ observations on the shared community of language of previous centuries, and identified the industrial revolution as the

⁵⁴ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, pp. 205-209.

⁵⁵ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (Harmondsworth, Peregrine/Penguin, 1979), p.72. Subsequent references to Q. D. Leavis are to this title.

⁵⁶ Virginia Woolf, ‘Middlebrow’ in *The Death of the Moth, and other essays*, in Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection, location: 52147 of 182519.

⁵⁷ Q D Leavis, pp.73-74.

⁵⁸ Melissa Sullivan and Sophie Blanch ‘The Middlebrow-Within or Without Modernism’, *Modernist Cultures*, Volume 6, Page 1-17 DOI 10.3366/mod.2011.0002, ISSN 2041-1022, at <http://www.eupublishing.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.3366/mod.2011.0002> [accessed 10/02/2014].

source of social and cultural fragmentation, as had Wordsworth before him. But Auden at least was pragmatic that those days were not going to return and that it was necessary to find a new model of cultural behaviour.⁵⁹ Inevitably there would be different opinions regarding the shape of such a new cultural model. Walpole, for his part, in an identification of the essential Philistinism of the British, had little time for the notion of a golden age of aestheticism in the Nation's past:

The English people in general went to the theatre for the crudest melodrama and the bawdiest farce. Did the people of England enjoy the sonnets of Sidney, the *Faerie Queen* of Spenser, the Essays of Bacon, the poems of John Donne? They were not, for the most part, aware of their existence.⁶⁰

Writing in *Downhill All the Way* (1967), Leonard Woolf takes issue with Q. D. Leavis, whom he describes as 'rather a hostile critic', for asserting that *To the Lighthouse* (1927) is 'highbrow art' and inaccessible to the 'common reader', which she does in order to highlight her theory of a falling standard from a previous era of general erudition.⁶¹ Woolf seems unconvinced that a modern public can make nothing of *To the Lighthouse*, when their ancestors' reading once included Laurence Sterne and Thomas Nashe as Leavis attests. In evidence Woolf cites the rising graph of sales of his wife's 'best serious novels' since 1928, and how they had eventually outstripped works he considers inferior, like *Orlando* (1928) and *The Years* (1937), by the 1960s.⁶²

Leonard Woolf seemed confident, while writing in the 1960s, of the continuing erudition of the public; commentators in the 1920s, such as Ford Madox Ford, considered the literary experiment of modernism to be the necessary means to maintain the traditional cohesion of the public sphere that Leavis alluded to. As Mark Morrisson indicates, increased

⁵⁹ W. H. Auden, 'Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Light Verse*', in *Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse, Volume 1: 1926-1938*, ed by E Mendelson (London, Faber and Faber, 1996), pp.430-436.

⁶⁰ Walpole, *Open Letter of an Optimist*, p. 19.

⁶¹ Leonard Woolf, *Downhill All the Way: An Autobiography of the Years 1919-1939* (London, Readers Union/Hogarth Press, 1968), pp.142-148. Subsequent references to Leonard Woolf are to this title.

⁶² Leonard Woolf, pp.147-148.

industrialisation at the turn of the century had seen the rise of advertising as a means to control consumption, by creating market niches and fostering consumer demand. The simultaneous development of the mass market press through technological advances in printing, and the availability of cheap paper, forged links between this print revolution, advertising, and the new culture of consumption, with concomitant ‘contamination anxiety’ in some quarters over an associated lowering of cultural standards.⁶³

One means to combat the dilution of cultural values was by entering the marketplace in order to compete with the products of mass culture, a solution which was for some time thought outside the orthodoxy of the ivory tower view of modernism. Such an action might be seen as having a threefold purpose, mobilising the mechanism of mass consumption to a ‘higher’ purpose, combating cultural decline, and guaranteeing the legacy of the movement. The virtual autonomy granted the Woolfs, through their publishing imprint The Hogarth Press, allowed them to act as patrons, to influence the next generation of modernists, a situation acknowledged by Leonard Woolf.⁶⁴ But this situation, one of perceived elitism, drew scorn, as noted by Chris Baldick:

From the inside, the Bloomsbury Group and the Auden Group were centres of modern enlightenment, but to indignant observers on the outside, such as the Leavises in Cambridge, both groups appeared to be cliques of effete poseurs dedicated chiefly to self-promotion.⁶⁵

Reminiscing in 1963, the writer Frank Swinnerton observed that, ‘If one did not belong to a group one called it a clique’, which perhaps says more about those writers who, like Walpole, felt stranded between movements and periods after the war had intervened in their careers.⁶⁶ Contemplating Q. D. Leavis’s *Fiction and the Reading Public* Swinnerton suggests that the Leavises, given the choice, actually preferred Bloomsbury and its satellites to best-sellers and

⁶³ Morrisson, pp.3-5.

⁶⁴ Leonard Woolf, pp.174-176.

⁶⁵ Baldick, *1910-1940: The Modern Movement*, pp.51-56.

⁶⁶ Swinnerton, p.71.

journalists, ‘Only Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, and T. F. Powys are to be admired’.⁶⁷ Unsurprisingly, as Baldick suggests, what arose was a self-contained caste who, despite literary sectarian and ideological feuds felt ‘they constituted an elite of sensitive and discriminating souls [...] a sort of spiritual aristocracy [...] threatened with extinction by the commercialised culture of the suburban hordes’.⁶⁸ Frank Swinnerton would go even further:

They stayed in their closets, continuing to meet, to talk, and to be to the end an immaculate body of adolescents. They saw none but men and women of their own social class, none who did not share their restricted but highly cultivated interests; and they continued to believe that those not in the charmed circle were inferiors to be shunned lest they spoiled the perfection of a dream.⁶⁹

It was in erecting a bulwark against the popular pleasures of the masses that ‘pretentious’ Bloomsburyites and ‘indignant’ Leavises might have found common ground; but what becomes apparent with investigation is that, as in the inclusive dinner parties of Osbert Sitwell, the apparently separate worlds of high culture and popular middlebrow ‘journalism’ were neither closed to each other nor always so clearly defined.

The public sphere

Nascent Modernists were already published alongside established Edwardians in A. R. Orage’s *New Age* and Ford Madox Ford’s *English Review*, Morrisson cites this as a willingness of the early modernists to engage with the public sphere rather than huddle in the confines of coterie publishing, even while expressing anxieties about the cultural decline immanent in that public sphere. Ford’s engagement with popular culture went so far as an attempt to write novels conforming to the formula of the best-seller, as typified by the works of Marie Corelli, with *Mr Apollo* (1908), and *The Half Moon* (1909), as well as pen portraits of popular literary figures and articles on the Music Hall. Nevertheless, his satiric swipes at the mass market press in *Mr Apollo* indicate a continuing anxiety about cultural standards

⁶⁷ Swinnerton, p.236.

⁶⁸ Baldick, *1910-1940: The Modern Movement*, pp.54-55.

⁶⁹ Swinnerton, p.138.

which seem to be handmaiden to the modernists' engagement with the wider marketplace.⁷⁰

Jenny McDonnell highlights the paradox inherent in John Middleton Murry's attempts to engage with the public sphere, with his journal *Rhythm*, while he continued to express his manifesto in terms that reinforced an antagonistic relationship between the artist and the masses.⁷¹

It was not always apparent to critics where boundaries should be drawn or what distinguished high art from mere journalism. In 1938, in *Enemies of Promise*, Cyril Connolly, in his chapter 'The Modern Movement', lists 'Some books in the Modern Movement 1900-1922' which, among the usual suspects, contains some potentially surprising names. Titles by Henry James, George Gissing, Hilaire Belloc, H. G. Wells, Galsworthy, Edmund Gosse, Arnold Bennett, Bernard Shaw, and Hugh Walpole, all feature in Connolly's list, alongside books by Conrad, Forster, Lawrence, Woolf and Joyce. That Connolly is clearly more concerned with the actual texts as representative 'modern' books, rather than the status of the authors as belonging to some distinct literary trend, shows a bias toward an analysis of literary history and a proselytising attitude to the writer's art.

I shall not group writers under movements, for the reason that between the nineties and the present day they scarcely exist. I recognise a complicating trend or inflation during the nineties, a simplifying one or deflation (realism, Georgian poetry) that followed. Then a further complicating process (Bloomsbury) and a further deflation (Hemingway), and I find the simplest guide the words used by writers themselves and the purposes for which they are employed. One faith unites all the writers discussed (with the exception of Shaw and Wells); whether realists, intellectuals, or imaginative writers, from Pater to Joyce they believed in the importance of their art, in the sanctity of the artist and in his sense of vocation. They were all inmates of the Ivory Tower.⁷²

Connolly's inclusivity stands in contrast to the stark delineation of high, middle, and lowbrow, utilised by Q. D. Leavis in *Fiction and the Reading Public* in 1932; for her some writers were journalists driven by commerce, and were unlikely to ever cross the threshold of

⁷⁰ Morrisson, pp.17-32.

⁷¹ Jenny McDonnell, *Katherine Mansfield and the Modernist Marketplace. At the Mercy of the Public* (Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), pp.62-63. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁷² Connolly, *Enemies of Promise*, p.29.

an ivory tower. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that throughout the Twenties and Thirties, despite strong opinions on all sides about art and culture and setting standards, those 'literary journals' cited as the arbiters of taste by both Orwell and Walpole, continued to display as catholic an approach to their contributors as did Osbert Sitwell to his dinner guests. J. C. Squire's *London Mercury*, as stoutly a conservative periodical as could be found, still occasionally made room for Virginia Woolf, Aldous Huxley, Vita Sackville-West and D. H. Lawrence in its pages.⁷³ Middleton Murry, when he took over *The Athenaeum* after editing *Rhythm* and *The Blue Review*, called upon the candidly middlebrow Frank Swinnerton to write for him, and share space with the Stracheys, the Woolfs, Bertrand Russell, Roger Fry, T. S. Eliot, and others 'confident in their own intellectual strength'.⁷⁴ Likewise, when he founded *The Adelphi*, a perhaps more determinedly middlebrow publication, Murry published Swinnerton, Walpole, and Arnold Bennett alongside Lawrence, and Murry's own late wife Katherine Mansfield. Writing to Swinnerton, Hugh Walpole had noted requests from *The Adelphi*, from Eliot at *The Criterion* and from *The Nation*, after its merger with *The Athenaeum*, and asked 'Can it be [...] that I am becoming highbrow? God forbid. As a matter of fact I fancy they're growing a little uncertain of their young genii and gazing at people like you and me a little doubtfully'; Swinnerton responded in agreement, 'that the stomachs of the highbrows occasionally sink as they contemplate their own works'.⁷⁵

A Question of Style

Disparate as the writers corralled into that movement now seem, and though wide differences were acknowledged even at the time, modernist writing did share certain attributes: a sense of disconnection from the past, a willingness to embrace new techniques and new philosophies,

⁷³ J. C. Squire, then R. A. Scott-James, eds., *The London Mercury: 1919-1939*, source I. D. Edrich: Modern First Editions Literary Periodicals, at <http://www.idedrich.co.uk/Mags/Lmags/LondonMercury.htm> [accessed 19/05/2014].

⁷⁴ Swinnerton, p. 67.

⁷⁵ Swinnerton, p.170.

a stylistic determination to separate, or merge to the point of invisibility, the author and the work, and a certain self-consciousness often portrayed as disillusionment. David Lodge's analysis goes some way to marrying the apparently opposing views of Bernard Bergonzi and Perry Meisel in his characterisation of the movement:

formal experiment, logical discontinuity, anti-rationalism, subjectivism, symbolism, eclectic mythologizing, radical questioning of accepted values and passionate commitment to art as an autotelic activity [...] the product of European Romanticism; [...] largely suppressed in Victorian England but re-imported there towards the end of the nineteenth century from the Continent of Europe as the English Literary world became more cosmopolitan.⁷⁶

One stylistic issue that emerged was that of subjectivity and objectivity in narrative practice, and to what extent should the authorial voice be hidden within the text. Not a particularly new idea, the critic Walter Pater had, in his essays on the Renaissance at the end of the previous century, declared that 'All art constantly aspires to the condition of music'.⁷⁷ In the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Oscar Wilde in epigrammatic style states that 'To reveal art and conceal the Artist is art's aim'.⁷⁸ Percy Lubbock was to address the issue in *The Craft of Fiction* (1921):

The whole intricate question of method, in the craft of fiction, I take to be governed by the question of the point of view—the question of the relation in which the narrator stands to the story. He tells it as *he* sees it, in the first place; the reader faces the story-teller and listens, and the story may be told so vivaciously that the presence of the minstrel is forgotten, and the scene becomes visible, peopled with the characters of the tale.⁷⁹

Lubbock also pre-empts Leavis by warning against the kind of shallow reading experience that only treats the novel at the level of entertainment, 'no artist (and the skilful reader is an artist) can afford to be swayed and beset by his material, he must stand above it'.⁸⁰ Lubbock later declares 'The well-made book is the book in which the subject and the form coincide

⁷⁶ David Lodge 'Literary Criticism in England in the Twentieth Century', *The Twentieth Century*, p.370.

⁷⁷ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London, Macmillan, 1919), p. 135.

⁷⁸ Oscar Wilde, 'Preface', *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Ware, Wordsworth Editions, 1992). p.3

⁷⁹ Percy Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1963), p. 251.

⁸⁰ Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, p.17.

and are indistinguishable—the book in which the matter is all used up in the form, in which the form expresses all the matter’.⁸¹

The question of subjectivity and objectivity is also engaged with in the context of tradition. David Ayers sees the neo-Classicism of Eliot, Pound and Wyndham Lewis to be driven by an opposition to the subjectivity of Romanticism.⁸² In his influential essay of 1919, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, Eliot writes of the persistence of great art which remains undiminished by time and modernity, a notion taken up by Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). Eliot cites the responsibilities owed by the artist, who recognises that their work has an effect on what has gone before, just as they stand in relation to tradition. These responsibilities include ‘self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality’, and ‘an escape from emotion’ such as that emotive response exemplified by the Romantics’ treatment of the sublime, and an attendant concentration on the work rather than on the artist.⁸³ The Imagist movement in poetry had also sought to reject the sentiment, the extraneous rhetoric, and the subjectivity of Romance, by paring back the language used by poetry to emphasise the object or image itself. Notable names associated with Imagism were T. E. Hulme, Hilda Doolittle (‘HD’), Amy Lowell, J. G. Fletcher, F. S. Flint, D. H. Lawrence, Richard Aldington and Ezra Pound, and the movement had a corresponding influence on the work of Eliot.⁸⁴ David Ayers sees the characteristic brevity of Imagist poetry as evidence of Ezra Pound’s distrust of the potentially corrupting power of written language.⁸⁵ Another important influence upon Eliot was the poet Jules Laforgue and the French Symbolists, initially encountered through Arthur

⁸¹ Lubbock, *The Craft of Fiction*, p. 40.

⁸² David Ayers, *Modernism: A Short Introduction* (Malden, Blackwell, 2004), pp.2-3. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁸³ T. S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London, Methuen, 1957), pp. 53-58.

⁸⁴ Suman Gupta, ‘T. S. Eliot, *Prufrock and Other Observations*’, in Richard Danson Brown & Suman Gupta, eds., *Aestheticism & Modernism: Debating Twentieth-Century Literature 1900-1960* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2005), pp.242-243.

⁸⁵ Ayers, *Modernism: A Short Introduction*, p.10.

Symons's book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899).⁸⁶ The American author Stephen Crane is also credited with having an influence on both modern fiction and modern verse. Crane, along with Henry James and Joseph Conrad, is cited by Ford Madox Ford as having an overwhelming influence on the development of the Anglo-Saxon and the British novel. Ford notes, 'All three treated their characters with aloofness all three kept themselves, their comments and their prejudices out of their works, and all three rendered rather than told.'⁸⁷ Despite his admiration for James and Conrad, Hugh Walpole found it impossible to excise his personality from his writing, not only does the authorial voice regularly intrude to guide the reader and anticipate the narrative, but he frequently cameos as a variety of romantic novelists within his own work.⁸⁸

Disillusionment and reaction

If the modern writer was urged to remove their presence from the narrative it was perhaps harder to disguise the self-conscious tone of disillusionment that seemed to grip the generation that had experienced the war. C. E. Montague who, in a reversal of the stereotype, had lied about being middle-aged in order to sign up, was in his mid-fifties in 1922 when he wrote his memoir *Disenchantment*, prompted by the sense that the idealism that had driven men to enlist was being betrayed by politicians and war-profiteers.⁸⁹ The Imagist poet Richard Aldington wrote *Death of a Hero* in 1929, a novel that reinforced the notion that the younger generation had been sacrificed by their elders.⁹⁰ Disillusionment is a word that crops up repeatedly in novels and essays in the decade following the War, in fiction and in the

⁸⁶ Erik Svarny, 'Eliot, Pound and Jules Laforgue', in *The Men of 1914* (Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1988), pp.44-64. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁸⁷ Ford Madox Ford, *The English Novel* (Carcenet, Manchester, 1997), p.137.

⁸⁸ Walpole's appearances in his own work will be discussed fully in Chapter 7. These caricatures are self-mocking and based upon both his physical appearance, and the popular critical appraisal of his work. Recognition of these self-caricatures does require some familiarity with the author and his history.

⁸⁹ C. E. Montague, *Disenchantment* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1922).

⁹⁰ Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1929).

critical works of Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster and George Orwell. Orwell goes further by identifying the lack of contemporary political engagement in the 1920s, not only with disillusionment, ‘no attention to the urgent problems of the moment, [...] no politics in the narrower sense’, but with a reactionary conservatism, a ‘worship of the meaningless’ and a ‘cosmic despair’ born of making art-for-arts-sake in a ‘comfortable epoch’.⁹¹ Malcolm Bradbury contends that modernism in the 1920s has only ‘oblique relations with the modern world’ making of modern experience ‘an aesthetic locale’.⁹² The apparent detachment of modernism in the 1920s may be compared with Hugh Walpole’s determination to engage with his times and document them.

With regard to ‘reactionary conservatism’ Sultan has noted the reactionary beliefs and ‘notorious politics’ of certain writers within English modernism, but reflects that such beliefs were not generally shared in the wider European context and should actually be judged against ‘an evolving liberal social democracy’.⁹³ Erik Svarny notes the ‘anti-democratic and anti-humanist cultural stances’ of Lewis, Eliot and Pound, within a context of oppositional tendencies, as a response, once again, to the emergence of mass culture.⁹⁴

Disillusionment and cynicism may have turned the artist’s attention inward upon the world of experience and perception. Acknowledging Joyce, Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Pound, Lawrence et al as representing this movement of the post-war period, Orwell points out their dissimilarities and their often personal antipathy to one another: ‘Lawrence and Eliot were in reality antipathetic, Huxley worshipped Lawrence but was repelled by Joyce, most of the others would have looked down on Huxley, Strachey, and Maugham, and Lewis attacked everyone in turn’, but he opines that they were united by their ‘temperamental similarity [...]

⁹¹ Orwell, *Inside the Whale*, pp.27-29.

⁹² Bradbury, *The Twentieth Century*, p.181.

⁹³ Sultan, p.116.

⁹⁴ Svarny, pp.2-4.

pessimism of outlook'.⁹⁵ Orwell can praise gifts and condemn attitudes within a couple of paragraphs and nowhere is this seen more than in his assessment of the writers of the following decade, the more clearly-defined Auden-Spender grouping of the 1930s. His arguments suffer from his *ad hominem* attack on Auden in particular, and even while acknowledging the political engagement of the Thirties poets compared to their predecessors, he can be scathing of their public-school Marxism and blind to their use of irony.

That Orwell should make much of his criticism personal is entirely typical of the era, with critical and personal antipathies played out in print. Walpole's remark in *The Young Enchanted* about the squabbling over literary values is precisely on the mark, although squabbling often covered wider ground than that of literature.⁹⁶ In her gently satirical 'Diary' originally for *Time and Tide*, E. M. Delafield notes receipt of a new *Literary Review* 'which seems to be full of personal remarks from well-known writers about other well-known writers. This perhaps more amusing to themselves than to average reader'.⁹⁷ Where literary values were concerned, the famous rivalry, which itself had a personal tinge, between A. R. Orage's *New Age* and Middleton Murry and Katherine Mansfield's *Rhythm*, over the very nature and scope of modernism itself, has been compellingly charted by Faith Binckes in *Modernism, Magazines, and the British Avant-Garde* (2010).⁹⁸ *New Age* was quite able to harbour apparently conflicting views in its own pages, cheerleading for the movement while enthusiastically lampooning its pretensions, and quite catholic in its choice of contributors.⁹⁹ And Mansfield herself was not so intransigent as to allow literary politics to block her attempts to embrace the public sphere.

⁹⁵ Orwell, *Inside the Whale*, pp.24-25.

⁹⁶ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. 209.

⁹⁷ E. M. Delafield, *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* (London, Virago Press, 1991), p.117.

⁹⁸ Faith Binckes, *Modernism, Magazines, and the British Avant-Garde: Reading Rhythm, 1910-1914* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹⁹ Ann L. Ardis, "'Life is not composed of watertight compartments": the *New Age*'s critique of modernist literary specialisation', in *Modernism and Cultural Conflict, 1880 to 1922* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.143-168, at <http://library.brown.edu/cds/mjp/pdf/ArdisModernism.pdf> [accessed 30/05/2014].

Katherine Mansfield with her pioneering of the short story form in English has become something of a standard bearer for literary modernism. Jenny McDonnell has charted the ‘erasure of the authorial perspective’ from Mansfield’s work, and the theoretical approaches which saw her emerge on her own terms as an ‘authority’.¹⁰⁰ Crucially McDonnell relates this trend in Mansfield’s development with her acknowledgement of the diverse nature of her audience, which could be reached by different means, and the juxtaposition of a modernist aesthetic in her work coinciding with an increasing engagement with the literary marketplace.¹⁰¹ That a tension remained between ‘popularity’ and ‘literary respectability’, and between the magnitude of various ‘brows’, is signified by Mansfield striving to perfect technical expertise in the short story form, while forging a career that encompassed both high modernist ambitions and accessibility, through a mass market medium, for a broader popular audience.¹⁰² This desire to embrace the public sphere, and to an extent popular culture, may be compared with the early adversarial approach of Lewis and Pound as indicated by Erik Svarny.¹⁰³

Mark Morrisson has countered the orthodox view of modernism’s scepticism of the ability of art and literature to enter the public sphere. He suggests, that initially at least there was a prevalent optimism that such access could be orchestrated via an engagement with the medium of commercial advertising and publicity, inspired by the ‘counterpublic sphere’ activities of the suffragists and the anarcho-syndicalists.¹⁰⁴ Morrisson acknowledges however that this experiment had failed or at least fizzled out by the 1920s, partly through lack of financial backing, and partly through the broad church heterogeneity of many of the literary magazines when compared to the niche marketing tactics of the popular prints,

¹⁰⁰ McDonnell, p.78

¹⁰¹ McDonnell, pp.78-79.

¹⁰² McDonnell, pp.140-150.

¹⁰³ Svarny, pp.30-32.

¹⁰⁴ Morrisson, pp.84-85.

pursuing homogeneity of consumer aspiration. However, Morrisson stresses evidence of transference, in the adoption of the visual language of modernism by advertisers, and the means by which some modernist writers and publishers manipulated ‘monopolistic practices of scarcity’, to promote their work through limited editions and patronage.¹⁰⁵

Leonard Woolf enthusiastically devotes space in his autobiographical memoir of 1968 *Downhill All the Way* to ‘the economics of the literary profession in the 1920s’.¹⁰⁶ He shows how his wife Virginia’s earnings rocketed after the publication of *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) in the middle of the decade and how the Hogarth Press, born out of a desire for artistic autonomy, rapidly became a commercial enterprise. Despite flirting with partnerships with James Whittall and the publishers Heinemann, Woolf claims he did not want the Hogarth Press to produce books to be ‘looked at’ rather than read, he rather disparagingly cites the Kelmscott and Nonesuch presses, and counters accusations of being precious about art and culture, and the image of Virginia as ‘queen of Bloomsbury’.¹⁰⁷ No one could deny that the earliest manifestation of the Hogarth Press was as a coterie publisher, but in delineating his activities in the world of commercial publishing Woolf is clearly unhappy with the elitist label which has affixed to it and to Bloomsbury. Woolf displayed wide business acumen, and he is impatient with the inability of other publishers to read the market and respond to it.¹⁰⁸ Woolf’s self-taught grasp of independent publishing compares favourably when considered alongside Middleton Murry’s ongoing struggles in the industry.¹⁰⁹ That the Woolfs were detached from mere commerce is solidly refuted by the enthusiasm with which Leonard Woolf produces tables and figures to indicate not only the boost in his wife’s earnings from about 1925 on, but the expanding income from the Hogarth Press from the 1930s. Woolf

¹⁰⁵ Morrisson, pp.203-205.

¹⁰⁶ Leonard Woolf, p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Leonard Woolf, p.80.

¹⁰⁸ Leonard Woolf, pp.169-171.

¹⁰⁹ McDonnell, pp.56-57.

uses the term ‘best-seller’ rather loosely when one compares the publications of the Hogarth Press to sales figures for popular fiction, but for what was originally seen as a coterie enterprise, to be selling titles in their thousands was no mean feat.

Critically speaking, the modern movement effectively seized the means of production. Through the establishment of little magazines and book publishing imprints, as well as being taken up by new mainstream publishing houses, modernist authors and publishers emerged as the ‘shrewd profit-maximising entrepreneurs’ identified by book historians.¹¹⁰ Problems surrounding publication of their work, as well as the simple desire to create a platform for their philosophies had seen the proliferation of journals in which writers could promote their critical opinions, as well being an exciting new medium for the nascent short story form. Ford Madox Ford founded *The English Review* in 1908 and *The Transatlantic Review* in 1924, giving debuts to many modernists as well as publishing work by established figures. A. R. Orage’s *The New Age* appeared in 1908, pursuing an at times acrimonious rivalry with John Middleton Murry’s *Rhythm*, founded in 1911 and edited by Murry and Katherine Mansfield. Between 1911 and 1919 the suffragist Dora Marsden edited the short-lived *Freewoman*, then *The New Freewoman*, and finally *The Egoist* with Harriet Weaver, based on the philosophical ideas of Max Stirner’s *The Ego and His Own* (1844); the *Egoist* first serialised Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* between 1914 and 1915. Wyndham Lewis founded *Blast* in 1914, Murry edited *The Athenaeum* in 1919 and *The Adelphi* in 1923, and Eliot edited *The Criterion* in 1922. These journals provided a showcase for new fiction and poetry, and a forum for critical debate.

David Lodge, writing in 1970, divided critical writing and critics into three ‘types’: the ‘academic’ such as I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, and C. S. Lewis; the ‘creative writer’ like Eliot, Lawrence, and Henry James; and the ‘freelance’, to include Middleton Murry,

¹¹⁰ See Jonathan Rose, in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, p.343.

Strachey, and Cyril Connolly. Lodge then centres Eliot as the writer to whom modern criticism owes its legacy.¹¹¹ Eliot is still influential today, the rise of ‘Theory’, structuralism, challenges to the canon, the supplanting of the literary canon by the critical canon, and variously gendered debates, all reinforce his dictum of 1921 that ‘criticism is as inevitable as breathing’.¹¹² However, just as the small circulation of little magazines, and limited print runs for books prompted the charge of coterie publishing, reinforcing the image of the closeted ‘charmed circle’ in Swinnerton’s phrase, so the selective critical stance of modernist practitioners paved the way for the coterie critical canon, judging which writers were worthy of study.¹¹³

Ultimate control of the critical canon, through publishing and reviewing, with its concomitant value judgements, worked towards the self-positioning of modernism as the pinnacle of high culture. A reading of the movement as culturally austere and separate from the marketplace could then anachronistically grow out of this very engagement with commerce. This construction of modernism as an anti-materialist ivory tower has of course been challenged in the last twenty years or so, in works exploring the relationship between modernism and the wider publishing world. Innovation and specialisation had, with the establishment of new firms, been a fact in the world of publishing since the 1890s, and these firms were then able to exploit the new market for modernist literature. Research by Dettmar and Watt, *Marketing Modernism* (1996), Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism* (1998), and others, by examining publishers’ records and correspondence, has revealed the extent to which modernism engaged with entrepreneurship.¹¹⁴ The essay collection *Modernist Writers and the Marketplace* (1996) examines how a range of writers from Henry James, Conrad, and Yeats, to Lawrence, Joyce, Eliot, Woolf, and Pound, sought to control the publication and

¹¹¹ Lodge, *The Twentieth Century*, pp.362-372.

¹¹² Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *The Sacred Wood*, p.48.

¹¹³ Swinnerton, p.138.

¹¹⁴ Rose, in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, p.343.

marketing of their works.¹¹⁵ David M. Earle, in *Re-Covering Modernism* (2009), has gone even further by showing how modernism pervaded popular culture with the appearance of texts in mass-produced ‘pulp’ journals, an unlikely yet satisfying synchronisation between the rarefied world of elite culture, seeking to leave its mark on posterity, and the thoroughly modern world of mass production and disposable literary ephemera.¹¹⁶

Men and women of the canon

This study has shown that the canon of modernist writers up to the 1930s were a distinct group, of different tendency, united perhaps by a melange of influences and ideals.

Generational differences have been noted, as has post-war disillusionment, the importance of new scientific and philosophical ideas, and the notion that existing literature did not reflect ‘real life’ or the life of the human spirit. Added to this must be the influence of particular individuals. In ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, T. S. Eliot uses the analogy of chemical reactions to describe the objective artist remaining stable while acting as a catalyst. He could as easily have been describing the energy and influence of Ezra Pound, catalysing disparate elements, raising funds, promoting his protégés, colonising the literary pages of journals, and making it ‘new’. Sultan hails Pound’s ‘instrumentality as a compound of revolutionary leader and midwife of the modernist movement’, and its ‘prime mover’.¹¹⁷ Eliot, Pound’s protégé, in not only providing creative substance in the form of his poetry, but with his contribution to criticism, may be credited with bringing modernism into the mainstream. Eliot managed a transition from the confrontational Lewis/Pound phalanx, to the rarefied

¹¹⁵ Jim Barloon, ‘Modernists in the Marketplace’, review Willison, Gould and Chernaik, eds., *Modernists in the Marketplace* (New York, St Martins, 1996), in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1998, pp.192-196, at http://muse.jhu.edu.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/journals/english_literature_in_transition/v041/41.2.barloon.pdf [accessed 07/08/2014].

¹¹⁶ David M. Earle, *Re-Covering Modernism* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2009), pp. 1-15 at http://www.ashgate.com/pdf/SamplePages/Re_Covering_Modernism_Intro.pdf [accessed 26/05/2014].

¹¹⁷ Sultan, pp.118-122.

atmosphere of Bloomsbury, and the even more esoteric hinterland of the Sitwells, without ever perhaps fully consummating any of these relationships. Erik Svarny suggests that it was precisely the fact that ‘mutual respect’ took precedence over any real intimacy in these encounters that enabled Eliot, through his ‘implicit detachment’, to navigate the various echelons of English literary society.¹¹⁸ What Svarny sees as a detached but effective expertise in cultural politics, translates as a single-minded exercise in ‘getting-on’ in literary society, although Eliot had a Prufrockian reticence to overcome, and he did remain loyal to his earlier confreres. Although a target for anti-intellectualism, the Bloomsbury Group were genuinely concerned with setting and maintaining a literary standard, and while Wyndham Lewis announced himself with an almost nihilistic desire to blast much that he perceived as shoddy and second-rate, this arose from a similar concern. Many of these creative individuals would not have brought their ideas to fruition were it not for the encouragement, and especially the funds, of sponsors and patrons like Amy Lowell, Harriet Weaver and Sylvia Beach without whom James Joyce would probably have foundered in poverty, John Quinn, and Margaret Anderson. Leonard Woolf in *Downhill All the Way* provides a rather more satirical view of aristocratic patrons, such as Lady Ottoline Morrell, who provided introductions and entrances to English literary society via the salon.¹¹⁹

Eliot’s declaration in ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ that the addition of a new work of art to the existing order alters that order, in terms of the relationship ‘of each work of art toward the whole’, so that the conformity between old and new may be maintained, also holds true with regard to the critical response to modernism.¹²⁰ T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, the latter with some reservations, were acclaimed by F. R. Leavis in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932), as upholders of literary excellence. In his ‘Retrospect 1950’, with the

¹¹⁸ Svarny, pp.225-226.

¹¹⁹ Leonard Woolf, pp.100-107.

¹²⁰ Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *The Sacred Wood*, p. 50.

modernist canon established, if not actually assembled under that convenient soubriquet, Leavis lays claim to the pioneering status of his early critical response and the 'disfavour' it was met with by his contemporaries.¹²¹ While there is no reason to query Leavis's recollection of events, one must accept Erik Svarny's assessment of Eliot's transition from agent provocateur, allied with Lewis and Pound, to becoming a central figure in English literary culture by the mid-1920s.¹²² Eliot's gradual acceptance by the literary establishment redefined it, as modernism became that establishment. This consolidation of modernism, also construed as a failure of radical reinvention, replaced by what Svarny terms a defensive reactionary conservatism and the 'refusal of the cultural present', results in the presentation of an implacable, but embattled, front against the incursions of popular culture.¹²³

Modernism may then be seen as some form of benign virus blown in from Continental Europe, or transplanted from across the Atlantic, mutating as it crossed the Ireland of James Joyce, causing eruptions of activity for a couple of decades, but ultimately subsumed by the antibodies of emergent mass culture. Or it may be acknowledged as an indigenous growth, with visible origins in the existing literary order, and with a corresponding and modifying effect on that order after it became established. Accepting the latter, Anne Fernihough can confront the radical tradition in Edwardian literature and discover a common vitalist and individualistic ideology with that of modernism, and with the threats posed by 'urbanization, suburbanization, democratization, mechanization and industrialization' as shared shibboleths.¹²⁴ Fernihough's argument is that Edwardian literature stands accused of materialism, abstraction, and over-intellectualism, by the spiritual and intuitive modernists, failings that the vitalist and individualistic strand in radical Edwardian realism would reject.

¹²¹ F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (Harmondsworth, Pelican/Penguin, 1979), pp. 158-162.

¹²² Svarny, p.227.

¹²³ Svarny, p.238.

¹²⁴ Suzanne Hobson, 'A luminous halo', review of Anne Fernihough, *Freewomen and Supermen*, in *Times Literary Supplement*, No. 5797, 09/05/2014 (London, Times Literary Supplement Ltd., 2014), p.29.

The modernists themselves stood accused of abstraction and over-intellectualising by these self-same Edwardian realists and, as regards materialism, the myth that modernism was immune to commercial concerns has been shown to be somewhat short of the truth.¹²⁵

Progressive politics and modern psychology while engendering controversy were also good for sales, and even issues of obscenity and censorship had a pay-off in the market-place, in terms of lucrative marketing strategies, such as expensive limited editions which proved able to avoid Home Office embargoes.¹²⁶

What emerges from these apparent contradictions is an ambivalence at the heart of modernism, this ambivalence can arise from any attempt to define the ‘modernity’ of modernism itself. A movement espousing cultural elitism, established in an ivory tower raised above the shingle roofing of mass culture, which of necessity with its very engagement with the modern world was forced to descend to the street level of motor cars, slang, mass production, cinema, and the popular prints.

Cinema in particular, with its potential as a new language, fascinated the modernists. Wyndham Lewis manipulated cinematic imagery in *Tarr* (1918), *The Apes of God* (1930), and *The Revenge for Love* (1937), and the poet HD was a founder of the film journal *Close Up* as well as collaborating in making films. Imagery and movie culture not only infiltrated modernist writing but there was an attempt to harness the very language of film and adapt it to prose.¹²⁷ In her essay ‘The Cinema’ from 1926, Virginia Woolf deplores film adaptations of ‘the most famous novels of the world’, but is positive about the potential of cinema to

¹²⁵ Lawrence Rainey, *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1998).

¹²⁶ Rose, *A Companion to the History of the Book*, p.344.

¹²⁷ Rachel Potter, *Modernist Literature* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp.152-167.

develop its own language, ‘it seems plain that the cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression’.¹²⁸

In the above illustrations we have seen a ‘closeted’ cultural elite manning the barricades against mass culture, and a set of shrewd entrepreneurs enthusiastically participating in the commodification of art; that these are two different faces of the same movement is one of the contradictions of modernism, as is the notion that this movement could ever be successfully examined in isolation from its wider cultural milieu. Equally, there is a risk in any study which seeks to challenge the received notions of modernism that such criticism can become confrontational and the analysis adversarial. Even where critics do not come into open conflict the resulting debate can sometimes appear to be more about theoretical approaches rather than the corpus of work under discussion. Peter D. McDonald argues that Lawrence Rainey’s work in *Institutions of Modernism*, while ground-breaking and invaluable in its engagement with publishing history, can nevertheless be reductive in that it over-emphasises the importance of the entrepreneurship of coterie publishing. And while suggesting that the rise of modernism may be charted against a set of unique circumstances, the rise of small magazines and new imprints, McDonald sees Rainey using this to challenge the worth of close reading against publishing history as a means of cultural analysis. McDonald, as a cultural historian himself, ruefully notes the partition of territory, between critics and theorists administering close reading, and bibliographers, editors, and historians overseeing publishing provenance.¹²⁹ While also acknowledging the importance of his work, the lack of space for textual analysis in Rainey is also cited by Jenny McDonnell in her work on

¹²⁸ Virginia Woolf, ‘The Cinema’, in *The Captain’s Death Bed and Other Essays*, in Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection, location: 58940 of 182519.

¹²⁹ Peter D. McDonald, ‘Modernist publishing: “Nomads and mapmakers”’, in *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, Bradshaw David, ed. (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), at Blackwell Reference Online, http://www.blackwellreference.com/subscriber/tocnode.html?id=g9780631220558_chunk_g978063122055814 [accessed 30/05/2014].

Katherine Mansfield.¹³⁰ Arguably, close reading and textual analysis has been the dominant approach within literary studies, while the examination of publishing history has offered a nuanced approach to the field. As an admirable compromise, Stanley Sultan, in his Introduction to *Eliot, Joyce and Company*, has already stressed the benefit to the scholar of literary history of an intimacy with the texts, and the rewards to the textual critic of a familiarity with context.¹³¹

Tradition and transition

The delineation of a literary movement provides a convenient tool, like all critical methods. Stanley Sultan stresses that a named literary period cannot encompass all that a particular work entails. There exists an affiliation made up of shared characteristics and tendencies between the work, and the ‘doctrines, intentions, and unconscious assumptions’ underlying a movement, and movements remain ‘persuasive accounts of reality that are neither demonstrable fact nor demonstrable fiction’.¹³² The inability to shoehorn a particular author into a movement can sometimes result in the marginalisation of that individual, however interesting their work might be in and of itself. Once he had fallen into obscurity, assumptions and received notions about Hugh Walpole became in themselves canon, with little cause to challenge them. Examining Walpole in the context of the movement that has come to dominate his era in critical terms, will allow for an analysis that goes beyond the reductive label ‘popular author’, to examine the writer’s self-construction as a Romantic with aspirations to meld tradition with theories of modern realism.

Any study of Walpole is hamstrung by his ambiguity of expression when he explains what being a Romantic means: ‘that attitude to life which insists that there are more spiritual

¹³⁰ McDonnell, p.5.

¹³¹ Sultan, p.xiv.

¹³² Sultan, p.101.

worlds than this one in which we live and that it is man's chief business to discover his relation to these worlds'.¹³³ Is Walpole romantic insofar as he writes romances, or a Romantic in that he follows the philosophy of Romanticism (while still writing romances)? Romanticism and romance-writing appear to be interchangeable terms for Walpole, and any confusion on the part of this study as to his precise definition is perhaps more a reflection of the need to make that critical distinction, a distinction which Walpole apparently feels is unnecessary. To compound the confusion, Walpole will be seen to be similarly diffuse when defining the trend for literary realism, and its medium 'the modern novel'.

Despite his avowed intention to forge a literature of transition between the traditional novel and the modern novel, by acknowledging new techniques and with an awareness of modern psychology, Walpole was not entirely convinced by the modern novelist's embrace of realism, and what he saw as the abandoning of those traditional narrative staples of plot and characterisation. E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927) also affirms the centrality of story and plot to the novel, comparing the approaches of Walter Scott, Arnold Bennett, Tolstoy, and, as a noble but doomed experiment in abandoning narrative time, the modern writer Gertrude Stein. For Forster, as for Walpole, the novel must tell a story and 'the novel that would express values only becomes unintelligible and therefore valueless'.¹³⁴ Despite Forster's endorsement of story-telling, he appears to accept it only as a necessary evil; and while singling out Walter Scott's powers of suspense as an example, he clearly feels that particular writer's reputation survives on sentiment rather than upon ability. Scott, in Forster's view, is trivial and structurally unsound, with no artistic detachment and no passion; he is clumsy and artificial, with 'a purely moral and commercial integrity' only.¹³⁵

¹³³ Hugh Walpole, and Clemence Dane, *Claude Houghton* (London, Heinemann, 1935), pp. 2-3.

¹³⁴ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London, Penguin, 1990), p. 53. Subsequent references to Forster are to this title.

¹³⁵ Forster, p. 44.

This view of Scott, which Forster stresses is highly personal, remains important because Scott was such an important influence on Hugh Walpole. In 1936 in an issue of *Books Abroad* an international line-up of writers were asked to cite their influences for 'My Debt to Books', and Walpole tried to pin down his own romantic inspiration:

As to the books that have influenced me in my writing, three novelists stand out beyond all others, Walter Scott, Dostoevsky and Hawthorne. From Scott, the first novelist I ever read, I caught a narrative gift which I have never been able to lose in spite of its contemporary unpopularity. *Redgauntlet*, incidentally, seems to me the finest romantic novel in the world. Dostoevsky, whose *Brothers Karamazov* to my way of thinking is the greatest novel ever written, taught me tolerance and made me attempt an atmosphere of spiritual struggle which I've never been able to capture. Hawthorne I loved and still love because of his marvellous atmosphere, half dream, half reality.¹³⁶

In his Rede Lecture in 1926 Walpole had claimed Scott as a 'dominating influence', while acknowledging the shortcomings in the author's technique that had made it the fashion to 'sneer' at him.¹³⁷ Such is Walpole's self-conscious defence of Scott that he highlights those areas where their respective writing styles align; the ability to tell a story is something attributed to both authors, but Walpole particularly excuses Scott's clumsiness and mistakes as arising from the excitement of composition, an extenuating circumstance he often claims for himself, neither writer having laid much store by re-editing.¹³⁸ Scott has a further significance, as an author whose work represented the transitional status that Walpole was

¹³⁶ Walpole, 'My Debt to Books' in *Books Abroad*, vol. 10, no. 3 (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1936), p.274 at <http://search.proquest.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/docview/1310474080/fulltext/1?accountid=14697> [accessed 25/02/2013].

¹³⁷ Walpole, *Reading: An Essay* (New York and London, Harper & Brothers, 1927), pp.22-23. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹³⁸ It is perhaps indicative of how Walpole has been served by literary posterity, that the inattentive indexer of Rupert Hart-Davis's biography claims that Walpole 'believes himself reincarnation of [Scott]', whereas Hart-Davis accurately quotes Walpole's *The Crystal Box*, wherein Walpole imagines himself in a past life being an Edinburgh bookseller, serving not only Scott but James Hogg, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 180 and 'Index', 'Scott, Sir Walter', p. 499.

attempting in his own writing, and as an author who combined commercial and critical success.¹³⁹

Both Scott and Walpole's literary careers spanned periods of political and cultural change, Scott's during the 'age of revolution', Walpole's between two World Wars.¹⁴⁰ Louis Cazamian suggests of Scott that despite navigating two generations of Romanticism, and transitioning from poet to novelist against the background of revolution, war, and economic transformation of society, he did so with his opinions, temperament, and imagination unchanged, while exploiting 'greater freedom in a field of wider horizon'.¹⁴¹ Such a 'freedom' seems to be an opportunity afforded Hugh Walpole in his own time, and one he acknowledges with his intention to combine tradition with modern experiment, while acknowledging that by straddling literary eras he finds himself somewhat in limbo.¹⁴²

When the critical glass briefly focuses on Hugh Walpole today, when genre websites recruit his name for their index of authors, and when niche publishers revive some of his titles, it is the epithet 'gothic' that is most often ascribed to this lingering interest. Gothic is not a term Walpole would have used in relation to his own work, as in his time it solely described that late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century movement responsible for a plethora of 'trashy' novels interspersed with a handful of 'classic' romances. The Gothic now has a critical status and a wider coinage, evolved to the extent that, as Phil Baker has suggested, it 'even threatens to become our dominant genre'.¹⁴³ To better understand Hugh Walpole it will be necessary to examine the extent to which his traditional roots lie in the popular romance, expressed through the transformative and transitional literature of Walter Scott. In

¹³⁹ See Robert Miles, 'The moment of *Waverley*', in *Romantic Misfits* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 136-144. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁴⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1962).

¹⁴¹ Louis Cazamian, *Modern Times (1660—1940)*, in Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature* (London, J. M. Dent, 1943), p. 1021.

¹⁴² Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

¹⁴³ Phil Baker 'All over the place', review *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic* (Chichester, Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), in *TLS* no. 5770, Nov. 1, 2013 (London, TLS Ltd, 2013), p.12.

establishing the contexts in which to understand Hugh Walpole's status, this chapter has considered literary modernism as the defining movement of its period, and examined the writer's relationship with that movement; the next chapter will consider the romantic tradition to which Walpole claimed an affinity.

PART ONE
Contextual Background
Chapter Two: A Short History of Romance

This study has already noted Hugh Walpole's intention to write traditionally constructed novels, while acknowledging new techniques, and showing an awareness of modern psychology. As Walpole had written seventeen novels by the time he stated this ambition, and already enjoyed commercial success on both sides of the Atlantic, one may see this casting of his work, in terms of a literature of transition between the traditional novel and the modern novel, as a means to add critical heft to his existing reputation. The traditional literary technique that Walpole favoured, was that of narrative progression foregrounding plot and the creation of character. Key modernist works had appeared by the mid-1920s, many of which appeared to discard or adapt these formalities. However, as has been noted in the previous chapter, there was a tacit acknowledgement that any form of experiment should derive from an assimilation of tradition, 'innovation [...] brought about by minds familiar with the innovations of the past' as Frank Kermode has it.¹ Walpole's reference to new techniques and psychological insight appears to recognise the enterprise of the new generation of modernists, but it is not clear that he thought there was actually anything very new about what they were doing.

Recalling, in the memoir *The Crystal Box* (1924), his own arrival on the literary scene in 1909, Walpole remembers George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, and George Moore, as the veterans, 'sure of their immortality', and H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy and Joseph Conrad being 'still spoken of as young men of whom anything might be expected':

Everyone talked then of the novel – it had a great and wonderful new period of efflorescence; a push and masterly realism might take it anywhere. H. G. Wells had

¹ Frank Kermode, 'Biographical Preface', to Virginia Woolf, *The Mark on the Wall and Other Short Fiction* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), p. x.

made his now historic speech at “The Times” Book Club declaring that the time had now come for the novel to admit everything into its generous embrace. Henry James was showing in “The Wings of the Dove” that there were entirely new fields in psychology to be discovered, Conrad was showering down upon us pages of incomparable prose, Arnold Bennett flung with a careless, indifferent gesture that masterpiece “The Old Wives’ Tale” at the feet of the public.²

By the end of this sequence of memoir Walpole has seen the old guard challenged, with Wells, Bennett, and Galsworthy ‘torn to pieces’ by former admirers, Hardy and Conrad questioned, Meredith ignored, and James derided.³ The reference to ‘masterly realism’, and the subsequent cull of the ‘greats’, suggests that the novel was to take a different direction from the one that had been assumed. On Walpole’s evidence, while the novel had already been developing in a particular way, the manifesto eventually sloganised as ‘make it new’ by Ezra Pound created an artificial breach, which presumably his literature of transition was designed to bridge.⁴

In discussing modern techniques and modern psychology, Walpole remains sceptical that very much has changed at all. Writing in 1932, in his introduction to the Walter Scott anthology *The Waverley Pageant*, Hugh Walpole made what for him had become a regular observation upon the evolution, or lack of it, of the novel:

In the last hundred years the English Novel has experienced profound changes and, at the same time, has not changed at all. In the wider and deeper sense of the word *change* we cannot doubt but that both Swift and Sterne would find themselves quite at home in the creative world of a James Joyce and Aldous Huxley and that Jane Austen would have no hesitation in claiming Virginia Woolf as a blood relation.⁵

In Walpole’s view the great novelists and their great novels are not only timeless, and beyond considerations of fashion and technique, but as with the comparisons cited above entirely compatible, ‘The good novel of 1930 is no better than the good novel of 1830 and the

² Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, p. 74.

³ Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, pp. 76-77.

⁴ See Michael North, ‘Make it New’ in *Novelty: A History of the New* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2015), pp. 162-171.

⁵ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, p. xxxiii.

bad novel no worse'.⁶ Walpole stressed this opinion not only in 1932 in *The Waverley Anthology* but earlier in his autobiographical *The Crystal Box* (1924), in his Rede Lecture of 1925 published as *The English Novel: Some Notes on its Evolution*, and in *Reading: An Essay* (1927). His basic contention is that 'The arts do not advance'.⁷ This approximation of creation is the argument, rather better known, that E.M. Forster makes in the introduction to *Aspects of the Novel* (1927). Walpole's own conclusion is that, 'while humans remain the tale remains [...] And as in art there is no progress but only a procession of interpreters'.⁸

To place Hugh Walpole within this 'procession of interpreters' one must examine those specific traditions to which he bears allegiance. As seen in the previous chapter Walpole credits Walter Scott for bequeathing him a narrative gift, Nathaniel Hawthorne for his blend of dream and reality, and Fyodor Dostoevsky for a sense of spiritual struggle which Walpole concedes he has never quite managed to capture. Rather more than Hawthorne and Dostoevsky, it seems clear that Scott should be a role-model for Walpole, even beyond the narrative gift that the latter claims to have learned from him. Scott straddles the worlds of literary romance and 'realism', successfully occupying the transitional role that Walpole would aspire to, specifically by taking an existing form or tradition, the Gothic romance, and recasting it in a credible form for a modern audience. Scott did this while achieving critical and commercial success, proving Walpole's contention that such aspirations need not be mutually exclusive.

Defending Scott, because in 1932 that writer was decidedly out of fashion, Walpole claims his value lies in the fact that, 'whatever the changes in fashion and technique during the last hundred years', Scott 'was engaged on the eternal and unchanging preoccupations of the

⁶ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, p. xxxiv.

⁷ Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, p. 153.

⁸ Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, p.162.

novelist – narrative and character-creating’.⁹ This centrality of narrative and character-creation represents the main tradition of the English Novel that Walpole wishes to preserve in his own work. While these technical accomplishments are essential to Walpole’s understanding of the novelist’s art, he was equally influenced by the tropes of fantastic fiction.

Echoes of Gothic romance

Two years after *The Waverley Anthology*, in 1934, Macmillan reissued Hugh Walpole’s novels in a Cumberland Edition with prefaces by the author. In the Preface to the Cumberland Edition of *The Wooden Horse*, Walpole’s first novel originally published in 1909, he writes that despite his discovery of Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) in ‘a mangled French translation’, and his intention then ‘to write the maddest, wildest novel ever produced by an Englishman’, he actually produced a very ‘*mild*’ (his italics) novel, worthy of the respected and respectable novelist Charlotte Mary Yonge (1823-1901).¹⁰ *The Wooden Horse*, with its fairly straightforward plot of family conflict, would anticipate Walpole’s later domestic dramas. Harry Trojan returns home to the town of ‘Pendragon’, after a sojourn in New Zealand, to find himself estranged from his upper-class family, in opposition to those who would seek to modernise the neighbourhood, and at odds with provincial morality. Elizabeth Steele detects links to chivalric romances in *The Wooden Horse*, in that Trojan as the returning exile has to prove himself worthy of his right to primogeniture, which he does by the nature of his deeds. Despite its conventional plot, and in a device befitting the novel’s title, Walpole does manage to smuggle a hint of things to come

⁹ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, p. xxxv.

¹⁰ Walpole, *The Wooden Horse*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. ix. Subsequent references are to this edition.

into his narrative, in the macabre origin-story of the naming of the Trojan family home, ‘The House of the Flutes’.

Of course, it had its origin in tradition. In the early days when might was right, and the stronger seized the worldly goods of the weaker and nobody said him nay, there had been a Sir Jeremy Trojan whose wife had been talk of the country-side both because of her beauty and also because of her easy morals. Sir Jeremy having departed on a journey, the lovely Lady Clare entertained a neighbouring baron at her husband’s bed and board, and for two days all was well. But Sir Jeremy unexpectedly returned, and, being a gentleman of a pleasant fancy, walled up the room in which he had found the erring couple and left them inside. He then sat outside, and listened with a gentle pleasure to their cries, and, being a musician of no mean quality, played on the flute from time to time to prevent the hours from being wearisome. For three days he sat there, until there came no more sounds from that room; then he pursued his ordinary affairs, but sought no other wife – a grim little man with a certain sense of humour.¹¹

In an otherwise stoically realistic narrative, this rather gratuitous insert recalling an unspecified and violent era of the past, with its echoes of both Robert Browning’s ‘My Last Duchess’ (1842) and Poe’s ‘The Cask of Amontillado’ (1846), heralds Walpole’s affinity with the Gothic macabre, and his incorporation of these influences into a modern context.

Despite having raised the spectre of Gothic romance in *The Wooden Horse*, in the Preface to his anthology *Four Fantastic Tales* (1932), Walpole noted that the novel ‘had been written on the safe side’, and about ‘*real* life’ (his italics), while his second book was ‘to be the exact opposite – wild and fantastic, with the Devil as one of the principal characters’.¹² This second novel was *Maradick at Forty* (1910), its subtitle, ‘A Transition’, already signalling both Walpole’s credo regarding the balancing of tradition and modern techniques, and his own development into the sort of writer he wished to become after his conventional debut.

In the Preface to the Cumberland Edition (1934), Walpole identifies *Maradick at Forty* as his first attempt at ‘*genre*’, and includes *The Prelude to Adventure* (1912), *Portrait of a Man*

¹¹ Walpole, *The Wooden Horse*, pp. 25-26.

¹² Walpole, ‘Preface’ in *Four Fantastic Tales* (London, Macmillan, 1932), p. viii. Subsequent references are to this edition.

with *Red Hair* (1925), and *Above the Dark Circus* (1931), as further attempts in a field exemplified for him by Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables* (1851).¹³

Walpole's use of the 'genre' label for these particular novels would be helpful but for the terms used to codify the works overall, some are 'Romances', some are 'Novels', the distinction is not always clear. All that ultimately distinguishes Walpole's genre and non-genre novels is the degree to which they embrace sensation and the fantastic. Elizabeth Steele draws attention to the fact that Walpole 'was quick to seize on the unusual, turn it over in his imagination, and build it into the malevolent', and that in every one of Walpole's novels there occurs a scene conforming to historian Frank Mott's definition of literary sensationalism, with its portrayal of horror or violence or an adventurous escapade.¹⁴ Even in the Jamesian novel *The Duchess of Wrexhe* (1914), within a melodrama of warring generations largely played out in genteel drawing-rooms, Walpole cannot resist introducing a vignette of terror. Roddy Seddon, having forced his attentions on his reluctant wife Rachel, after her withdrawal from him on account of his philandering, is paralysed in a fall from his horse. Roddy's depression is manifested in a verbal and physical conflict with the apparition of a 'Creature', hovering above him, its 'breath warm and damp like the night air', as it urges him to overdose on morphia.¹⁵ Roddy eventually emerges from this personal hell through the realisation of his genuine love for Rachel, whereupon 'He took the Creature in his hands, wrung its neck and flung it out of the window'.¹⁶ Notwithstanding the bathos of that denouement, and the admittedly wafer-thin attempts at psychological insight, Walpole has laced a conventional narrative with what was to become his trademark evocation of the macabre.

¹³ Walpole, 'Preface' to *Maradick at Forty*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. vii.

¹⁴ Steele, pp.23-24.

¹⁵ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. 345.

¹⁶ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. 346.

Walpole stresses that to achieve success in genre writing requires belief in the existence of evil, something apparently realised for him in his own experience of being bullied as a schoolboy. As his character John Cornelius recalls:

“Well, by God, that’s the way romantic writers are made, by having your nose rubbed in the mud, by knowing what fear is, by loneliness, a small boy crying in his bed at night. If you don’t see the glory of God after that you can’t endure it – you cut your throat”.¹⁷

The desire to communicate the reality of evil unites all of Walpole’s books, whether he designates them genre ‘romances’ or ‘novels’, and he can note that from the outset of his literary career, ‘Here were the cloven hoofs of my romantic temperament unmistakably appearing’.¹⁸

The genre that ate modernity

The tale of terror, and of horror, along with various shades of imaginative fiction otherwise described as ‘fantastic’, ‘weird’, or ‘speculative’, and a plethora of sub-genres created to aid the marketing efforts of publishing companies, gather now for shelter under the popular umbrella genre of Gothic. It is as a genre writer that Hugh Walpole maintains a precarious existence, within indexes of authors of the fantastic on internet websites, and in reissues of some of his work in the catalogues of niche publishers, and it is the Gothic epithet that is most often applied to him.¹⁹ While there are similarities between Hugh Walpole’s interpretation of romance writing and the tropes associated with an expanded Gothic literature, it is not the intention here to shoehorn Hugh Walpole into a genre enjoying a critical revival; Walpole himself would have been suspicious of the appellation. However, the prominence of Gothic Studies over the last decade does give Walpole’s own

¹⁷ Walpole, *John Cornelius: His Life and Adventures*, Limited edition large paper copy (London, Macmillan, 1937), p. 184. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁸ Walpole, *Maradick at Forty*, pp. vii-ix.

¹⁹ Tarturus Press, Bruin Books, Valancourt Books, and Leonaur, have all published anthologies or new editions of selected Hugh Walpole titles since 2003.

romantic macabre pertinence, as a subject for recovery research within a Gothic chronology, which in turn opens a window onto the rest of his oeuvre.²⁰

The modern definition of this genre may share only tenuous links with the original Gothic fiction produced between the dates of 1760 to 1820. Jerrold Hogle has summarised the constituent elements defining Gothic fiction as, ‘an antiquated or seemingly antiquated space,’ within which ‘are hidden some secrets from the past (sometimes the recent past) that haunt the characters, psychologically, physically, or otherwise at the main time of the story’, whereby:

Gothic fictions generally play with and oscillate between the earthly laws of conventional reality and the possibilities of the supernatural [...] often siding with one of these over the other in the end, but usually raising the possibility that the boundaries between these may have been crossed, at least psychologically but also physically or both.²¹

Emma Clery notes that this ‘Gothic’ is a term largely coined in the twentieth-century, for the emergent genre that followed publication of Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). Clery suggests the subtitle, *A Gothic Story*, was added to *The Castle of Otranto* for its second edition (1765) merely as a flippant afterthought, and was a description which did not at the time establish any great traction.²² Clery defines the original Gothic stories of the eighteenth-century as experimental romances, following Horace Walpole’s lead when, for the preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, he offers his motives for that work as an attempt to marry the creative imagination of ‘old romances’ with the naturalism of modern eighteenth-century fictions.²³ Emboldened by the success of the pseudonymous first edition

²⁰ The Manchester Metropolitan University website provides an excellent introduction to publications, personalities, and cultural events, associated with Gothic studies, at <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/english/gothic-studies/> [accessed 17/08/2020].

²¹ Jerrold Hogle, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Jerrold Hogle ed. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 2-3. Subsequent references to Hogle are to this title.

²² Emma Clery, ‘The Genesis of “Gothic” Fiction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, pp. 21-22 and see attendant note 2, p. 37.

²³ Horace Walpole, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’, in *The Castle of Otranto*, in *Four Gothic Novels* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 11. Subsequent references are to the novel collected in *Four Gothic Novels*.

of *The Castle of Otranto*, which had been presented as a ‘found’ manuscript in ‘the black letter’, Horace Walpole revealed his authorship with that second edition, prefacing it with this apologia, both to explain his motivation and to justify the text on the grounds of its value as an exercise in literary experimentation.²⁴ Andrew Smith suggests that the prefaces to these two editions have generated as much critical debate as the novel itself, and between them they establish ‘the roots of the Gothic’ and ‘define some of its key features and ambitions’.²⁵

In the preface to the first edition, Horace Walpole, writing as fictional ‘translator’ William Marshal, presents the subsequent narrative as a manuscript, dating from the twelfth or thirteenth century, discovered in the library of a northern English Catholic family and translated from the original Italian.

Miracles, visions, necromancy, dreams and other preternatural events, are exploded now even from romances. That was not the case when our author wrote; much less when the story itself is supposed to have happened. Belief in every kind of prodigy was so established in those dark ages, that an author would not be faithful to the *manners* of the times who should omit all mention of them. He is not bound to believe them himself, but he must represent his actors as believing them.²⁶

Here Horace Walpole, in the guise of Marshal, strives to legitimise his text; the extraordinary events he is to recount occurred at a point sufficiently distanced in time when those kinds of phenomena were generally believed. Walpole’s modern, enlightened, and increasingly educated eighteenth-century readership may enjoy the narrative without owing to the gullibility of their forbears.²⁷

It is surely more than coincidence that Hugh Walpole’s ambition to meld tradition with modern psychological technique, as revealed to the readers of *The Best British Short Stories of 1926*, echoes Horace Walpole’s expressed desire in his preface to the second edition of *The*

²⁴ Horace Walpole, ‘Preface to the First Edition’, in *The Castle of Otranto*, p.7.

²⁵ Andrew Smith, *Gothic Literature* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp.18-19.

²⁶ Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*, p.8.

²⁷ See Lawrence Stone, ‘Literacy and Education in England 1640-1900’, in *Past and Present*, February 1969, No. 42 (Oxford, Oxford University Press for The Past and Present Society, 1969), pp. 69-139, at www.jstor.org/stable/650183 [accessed 12/08/2020].

Castle of Otranto to combine old-style romance with modern eighteenth-century realism.²⁸

There is an added layer of relevance, or perhaps contrivance, when considering Hugh Walpole's memory, in his autobiographical fragment *The Crystal Box* (1924), of the illegible letter which he and a school friend discovered, and decided represented his disenfranchised claim to the estate of the Earl of Orford, the baronetcy held by his ancestor Horace. The young Hugh Walpole, already an avid reader of romances, seems to have been writing himself into both the chronology and that staple of the Gothic tradition, contested issues of primogeniture.²⁹

Romantic advocates

As seen in the previous chapter, Hugh Walpole bemoaned the lack of critical support from his 'traditional' generation, those 'Edwardians' with whom he was temperamentally aligned, while acknowledging some support from the younger generation. In her 1930 appreciation of the eponymous author, *Tradition and Hugh Walpole*, Clemence Dane (the novelist and playwright Winifred Ashton) declares that the last war has sent writers back to 'their proper study – man – crying, [...] "What is evil?"'³⁰ She sees Hugh Walpole's concern with evil, and his 'attempt to revive the old-fashioned taste for horror', particularly by experimenting in his use of the 'fantastic', as evidence of his affiliation to the romantic tradition; but she goes on to say that the modern world, post- World War One, has had to approach the depiction of evil in a new way.³¹ Her argument is that the problem of good and evil involves 'a plunge into the unknown – the discovery of a new world', and therefore can only be tackled by romantics, at a time when romance in the traditional sense is unfashionable.³²

²⁸ Walpole, in Edward J. O'Brien, ed., *Best British Short Stories of 1926*, pp. 424-425.

²⁹ Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, pp. 14-15.

³⁰ Dane, p.151.

³¹ Dane, p.149.

³² Dane, pp.152-153.

The moralist, the romantic, and the realist demanded of English literature a type of novelist and a type of novel that should, [...] understand and satisfy their combined hungers: they demanded, not a traditional, but a traditive novel: a novel based on tradition, but not dependent on tradition.³³

Pre-empting Jorge Luis Borges and Vladimir Nabokov, Dane asks if the writer produces the reader, or the reader the writer, decides that it is the latter, and goes back to childhood tastes in story-telling and through a brief history of English Literature, before settling on Hugh Walpole as heir to this traditive mantle. A sort of experimental novelist with a sense of tradition, who can combine a moral compass with romance and realism, to appeal to an audience composed of Walpole's own definition of 'the Plain Man, [...] the Man in the Street, plus a little culture'.³⁴

Writing in 1933 in *Hugh Walpole: A Study*, Marguerite Steen senses a resurgence of Romanticism, the history of which she attributes to 'the graph of a nation's security and prestige'; furthermore she detects evidence that England might be about to challenge Germany as the flagship of the 'European spirit of Romance'.³⁵ 1933 was perhaps too early for Steen to connect the romantic ideal, taken to its extreme and twisted into perversion, to be helping feed the rise of fascism in 1930s Germany, but she makes the observation, that the 'cautious movement of literary [...] taste towards Romanticism', is the dawn of a revolt against materialism.³⁶ Steen declares that, 'The Romantic spirit in England reached its zenith during the two wide-apart reigns of Elizabeth and Victoria, having in each case its widely differentiated characteristic, its forms of expression equally distinct'.³⁷ Steen qualifies the robust romanticism of the first Elizabethans with the 'Anaemia' of the Victorians; finding the modern equivalent to have more in common with this Elizabethan ideal, but notes, 'We may

³³ Dane, p. 13-14.

³⁴ Walpole, *Reading*, p. 82.

³⁵ Marguerite Steen, *Hugh Walpole: A Study* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1933), p.285. Subsequent references to Steen are to this title in this edition.

³⁶ Steen, p. 285.

³⁷ Steen, p. 286.

not be prepared to return to *The Castle of Otranto*: why should we? To each age its own Romanticism'.³⁸

Steen's concept of Victorian romance is confined in her 'Postscriptum' to a comparison of Tennyson, Swinburne, and the Pre-Raphaelite school of painting, with the latter two faring better than the Poet Laureate who suffered from 'the repressive influences of Puritanism' and 'The curiously bleaching effect of the Genevan tradition'.³⁹ Steen references *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), as a touchstone in her concept of a romantic chronology, while ultimately discarding it as irrelevant to the modern age. This view of Gothic literature was prevalent at the time. It is still perhaps surprising that she dismisses Victorian romance as 'anaemic', and ignores that line of prose writing that follows on from *The Castle of Otranto* and the Gothic romance, and may be traced through Victorian sensation fiction to the romances of her own day. Marguerite Steen may not be prepared to return to *The Castle of Otranto*, preferring to define the romantic tradition in a vague emulsion of terms distilled from the Romantic sublime and Christian theology, but to make sense of Hugh Walpole's own experiments within tradition it will be necessary to make that journey back in time while considering some of his own work.

Case study: An introduction to *Maradick at Forty*

Maradick at Forty introduces the businessman James Maradick, who would later perform a pivotal cameo in *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925), as well as being referenced in further stories. Walpole would expand his fictional world to contain recurring characters like Maradick who, having been introduced in their own novels, could have 'walk-on-parts' in other books. Walpole greatly admired Trollope's *The Chronicles of Barsetshire* (1855-1867), and although he baulked at comparisons it is tempting to see, by drawing on a cast of regular

³⁸ Steen, p.288.

³⁹ Steen, pp. 286-287.

characters familiar to a loyal readership, his attempt to create an intertextual literary universe to emulate that of his guide.

In *Maradick at Forty* Maradick, with his wife and daughters, embarks upon the annual family holiday from Epsom to ‘Treliss’ in Cornwall; he is suffering a mid-life crisis, over-emphasised by the twenty-six-year-old Walpole who later admitted that at the time he ‘considered the age of Forty the end of all things’.⁴⁰ The Maradick marriage has become stale; Maradick is distant with no apparent affection for his children, and Mrs Maradick seems more concerned with comfort and status, while ensuring that tradesmen, station porters, and hotel proprietors do not take advantage of her. Staying at ‘The Man at Arms’, during that evening’s dinner, the couple’s relationship deteriorates further as Maradick confronts his wife over her complacency, and her indifferent treatment of him. After his wife has retired to bed, and unable to sleep himself, Maradick is joined by the young Tony Gale, son of Sir Richard and Lady Gale, who is also visiting Treliss accompanied by his parents and Alice du Cane, the girl to whom it is assumed he will soon be married. Marital tension among the middle-classes and the romances of the minor aristocracy provide a fairly conventional opening to *Maradick at Forty*, reminiscent of the ‘silver fork’ fiction of the early to mid-nineteenth century, but then some sort of ‘slippage’ occurs, and the story strays into the uncanny.⁴¹ Maradick and Gale investigate the last night of the annual fair taking place in the town itself.

According to ancient superstition, a procession was formed by all the citizens of the town, and this marched, headed by flaming torches and an ancient drum, round the walls. This had been done, so went the legend, ever since the days of the Celts, when naked invaders had marched with wild cries and derisive gestures round and round the town, concluding with a general massacre and a laying low of the walls. The town had soon sprung to life again, and the ceremony had become an anniversary and the

⁴⁰ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. vii.

⁴¹ The term ‘uncanny’ will crop up frequently in this study, in its current sense of something being weird and at odds with accepted notions of reality. This definition owes much to Sigmund Freud’s celebrated essay *Das Unheimliche* (1919) [full citation later], which suggested a sensation both mysterious and yet familiar. For a comprehensive study see Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003).

anniversary a fair. The last dying screams of those ancient peoples were turned, now, into the shrieking of a merry-go-round and the sale of toffy and the chattering of many old women; and there were but few in the place who remembered what those origins had been.⁴²

The repressed or forgotten memory of a pagan blood-letting has been transmuted into a three-day funfair culminating in a town procession, but something of the primitive origins of this event still clings to the modern ceremony. It is no coincidence that Walpole describes an itinerant preacher having to abandon his sermon in the face of the townsfolk preparing for the ritual. The march itself, with Maradick and Tony caught up in it, rapidly turns into a delirious dance of abandonment, with an unexpected aftermath. ‘The tune was wilder and wilder; the dance had done its work, and enough marriages were in the making to fill the church for a year of Sundays.’⁴³ Tony is energised, Maradick is embarrassed, but both men will find their lives changed by the sensual influence of the dance.

The Trellis Dance marks a decisive point in the narrative, moving it from the mundane modernity of Maradick’s business interests in Epsom, railway journeys, and the social etiquette surrounding a summer vacation, to the liminal stage in a larger ritual of transition for the main characters. The two men are about to meet Walpole’s evocation of the Devil, in the character of Andreas Morelli, a man with uncanny powers and barely controlled violent urges. Walpole brackets his description of the dance, and this turning point, with Tony’s evocation of two poets: Tennyson and Shelley. The young man’s love of poetry establishes Gale’s romantic nature, as counterpoint to his older friend’s dry practicality that borders on cynicism. Upon leaving the hotel, and inspired by the summer evening, Tony had quoted approvingly from the opening verses of Tennyson’s *In Memoriam A. H. H.* (1850).

Tennyson’s poem is a tribute to the poet’s late friend Arthur Hallam but also a philosophical discursion upon mortality, changing times, and transition. The essentially Romantic and

⁴² Walpole, *Maradick at Forty*, p. 48.

⁴³ Walpole, *Maradick at Forty*, pp. 53-54.

pastorally-inclined Tennyson lived through a period of economic and social upheaval, on the threshold of the modern era that Maradick and Tony Gale have inherited. Pertinent to the imminent revelation of the ‘Devil’, in the character of Andreas Morelli, who sublimates his violent urges in the evisceration of woodland creatures, Canto 56 of Tennyson’s poem refers to ‘Nature, red in tooth and claw’, a phrase that was to gain traction after the publication of Darwin’s theories of natural selection published in 1859.⁴⁴ After the dance Gale directs Maradick into a nearby pub, excitedly proclaiming it to be ‘Shelley’s Inn’, quoting from Thomas Jefferson Hogg’s anecdote about the vegetarian poet’s discovery of the joys of bacon at the inn on Hounslow Heath, and musing ‘Only it’s a Shelley night somehow’.⁴⁵ The novel seems to have shifted its main protagonists back in time, from the modern world, via the late-Victorian Romanticism of Tennyson, to Shelley and the peak of Romanticism. This summoning of Shelley has an added relevance to the plot, in the obstacles Tony will face in his love affair with Morelli’s daughter Janet, and his eventual elopement, and also as an evocation of the Gothic Shelley, representative of Romanticism’s dark twin.

If this reading seems intense it indicates Walpole’s eagerness to display his own scholarship and influences in a novel that best reflects his youthful ambitions. Elizabeth Steele provides an explication of *Maradick at Forty* as an adaptation of some of the elements of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, with Tony as Ferdinand, Janet as Miranda, and Morelli as an amalgam of Ariel and Caliban.⁴⁶ While Walpole himself never mentions *The Tempest* as source material, Steele’s close reading makes a convincing case for it, and Shakespeare would be an obvious choice for a young writer dipping his toe into the fantastic genre.

⁴⁴ Alfred Lord Tennyson, ‘In Memoriam A. H. H.’, in *Selected Poems* (London, Penguin, 2007), p. 135.

⁴⁵ Walpole, *Maradick at Forty*, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Steele, pp. 31-33.

Walpole wrote in his Preface to the anthology *Four Fantastic Tales* (1932) of his disappointment at critics' failure to recognise the 'spiritual implications' of his work.⁴⁷ Walpole acknowledges having 'to interpret the hidden world by using the phenomena of the exposed world as symbols', and cites some of the 'symbols' he uses, in *Maradick at Forty* crockery that Morelli smashes during one of his rages, the *Valse Triste* of Sibelius in *The Prelude to Adventure* (1912), and a copy of *Don Quixote* (1605) by Cervantes in *Above the Dark Circus* (1931), as 'signs and portents of a deeply important world'.⁴⁸ To be fair to his critics, even with Walpole's revelation of his use of symbols their meaning is far from clear, and neither is the nature of this 'hidden world' nor its importance. The smashed crockery in *Maradick* might be Morelli's way of objecting to the domesticity threatened by his daughter's marriage, the playing of the *Valse Triste* in *Prelude* is used to indicate an imminent death, and the copy of *Don Quixote* is a pointer to the romantic nature of certain characters adrift in the harsh modern world of *Above the Dark Circus*. It is possible to ascribe metaphorical significance to the symbols Walpole has chosen to highlight, but not necessarily in a way that points to the existence of a hidden world filled with spiritual implications. As regards the use of symbolism in the fantastic, consider André Breton's preamble to his analysis of English Gothic fiction:

It is only at the approach of the fantastic, at a point where human reason loses its control, that the most profound emotion of the individual has the fullest opportunity to express itself: emotion unsuitable for projection in the framework of the real world and which has no other solution in its urgency than to rely on the eternal solicitation of symbols and myths.⁴⁹

Given that Walpole's vaguely metaphysical description of a hidden world hardly points to its nature or location, the solution is perhaps to translate it as the world of the fantastic, as

⁴⁷ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. x.

⁴⁸ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. ix.

⁴⁹ André Breton, 'English *Roman Noirs* and Surrealism' (1937), extract from 'Limites non frontières du Surréalisme', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 48, 1, (1937); translated as 'Limits not Frontiers of Surrealism', in Herbert Read (ed.), *Surrealism* (London, 1936), pp. 106-11, extract reproduced in Victor Sage (ed.), *The Gothick Novel* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1990), p. 112.

derived from romantic literature. Breton goes on in his essay to concur with the Marquis de Sade, that Gothic fiction arose as an ‘expression of the confused feelings aroused by [the] nostalgia and terror’ of the Age of Revolution.⁵⁰ Walpole’s own harnessing of the fantastic may come to be seen as a reaction to World War and the economic, political, and cultural upheaval that followed.

The hidden world of romance

Ambrose Bierce in his *Devil’s Dictionary* (1911) provided a definition of romance which addressed the value of facts and truth in the novel as against the enjoyment of fiction for its own sake.

Romance, *n.* Fiction that owes no allegiance to the God of Things as They Are. In the novel the writer’s thought is tethered to probability, as a domestic horse to the hitching-post, but in romance it ranges at will over the entire region of the imagination – free, lawless, immune to bit and rein. [...] There are great novels, for great writers have “laid waste their powers” to write them, but it remains true that far and away the most fascinating fiction that we have is “The Thousand and One Nights”.⁵¹

Walter Scott defined romance as ‘a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents’, as opposed to the novel which was, ‘a fictitious narrative, differing from the romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society’.⁵² In Scott’s own romances marvellous and uncommon incidents are accommodated within a narrative of probability, while historical distance and the authorial voice inject a note of scepticism. The rather vague narrative gift that Walpole claims from Scott is this merging of the marvellous and uncommon with a depiction of everyday life, resulting in a romantic-realist hybrid.

⁵⁰ Breton, in *The Gothick Novel*, p. 113.

⁵¹ Ambrose Bierce, *The Unabridged Devil’s Dictionary*, David E. Schulz and S. T. Joshi eds. (Georgia, University of Georgia Press, 2000), p. 203.

⁵² Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works, Volume VI: Chivalry, Romance, The Drama* (Edinburgh, Robert Cadell, 1834), p. 129 at Internet Archive, web, <https://archive.org/details/essaysonchivalr01scotgoog/page/n144> [accessed 11/02/2019].

Hugh Walpole's own definition of romance writing seems to derive from Prince Hamlet's observation that 'There are more things in heaven and earth, /Than are dreamt of in your philosophy (Act 1: Scene 5).⁵³ In his appreciation of the works of the writer Claude Houghton (1935), Walpole expresses this in his own words, while acknowledging the difficulties writers like Houghton, and by association he himself, had encountered.

They would be courageous books in any time and in any country, but they are especially so just now because they have been written and published in an atmosphere opposed to their spirit. Houghton is a romantic and a mystic and his seven novels have appeared in what is the most realistic and unmystical period of the last hundred and fifty years. When I use romantic I mean of course none of the cloak-and-sword romance of the English novel of forty years ago. I mean something very much more important. I mean that attitude to life which insists that there are more spiritual worlds than this one in which we live and that it is man's chief business to discover his relation to these worlds.⁵⁴

David Punter has described Gothic writing as 'a contested site' and romance is no less hamstrung by ambiguous definition.⁵⁵ Walpole's description of Claude Houghton's romance writing, and talk of man discovering his relation to other spiritual worlds, appears to allow for the merging of the metaphysical philosophy associated with the Romantic Movement of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century with the psychological explorations of Gothic fiction.

Walpole does not necessarily see an affinity with romance as incompatible with authentic experience. In the Russian novel *The Secret City* (1919), the narrator Durward, that name surely drawn from Walpole's affiliation to Scott through the expatriate hero of *Quentin Durward* (1823), suggests that the subjectivity of personal experience could contain its own version of the truth.

The history of the human soul and its relation to divinity, which is, I think, the only history worth any man's pursuit, must push its way, again and again, through this

⁵³ William Shakespeare, 'Hamlet, Prince of Denmark', *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (New York, Avenel Books, no date ca. 1975), p. 1080.

⁵⁴ Hugh Walpole, and Clemence Dane, *Claude Houghton* (London, Heinemann, 1935), pp. 2-3.

⁵⁵ David Punter, 'Introduction: The Ghost of a History', in *A Companion to the Gothic*, David Punter ed. (Malden, Blackwell, 2008), p. viii.

same tangled territory which infests the region lying between truth and fantasy; one passes suddenly into a world that seems pure falsehood, so askew, so obscure, so twisted and coloured is it. One is through, one looks back and it lies behind one as the clearest truth.⁵⁶

Walpole's conflation of the philosophy of Romanticism with a sensibility acknowledging the potential existence of other worlds of experience, allows for those incidences of the 'marvellous' suggested by Scott's meditation on the use of the supernatural as a source for 'romantic fiction':

The belief itself, though easily capable of being pushed into superstition and absurdity, has its origin not only in the facts upon which our holy religion is founded, but upon the principles of our nature, which teach us that while we are probationers in this sublunary state, we are neighbours to, and encompassed by the shadowy world, of which our mental faculties are too obscure to comprehend the laws, our corporeal organs too coarse and gross to comprehend the inhabitants.⁵⁷

Walpole's own use of the supernatural allows for ambiguity. His books neither embrace full-blown supernatural horror nor incite terror only to explain it away. Believing in the existence of other worlds, Walpole seeks to integrate incidences of the 'marvellous' into his portrayal of a realistic world, and usually offers them without comment.

Gothic prelude

In *The Popular Novel in England* (1969) J. M. S. Tomkins states that the novel in the middle of the eighteenth century had turned its back on the old chivalric romance in order to 'establish domestic tragedy and the comedy of manners on the model of Richardson and Fielding', thus exiled romance had become debased.⁵⁸ But she emphasised an enduring appetite for the fantastic in literature:

The imagination of man is not satisfied with the contemplation of human nature and good sense. It craves first of all sensationalism, that crude intensification of life, and

⁵⁶ Walpole, *The Secret City*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. 28. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵⁷ Walter Scott, 'On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition; and particularly on the works of Ernest William Theodore Hoffmann' in *Foreign Quarterly Review*, I (1827), in Victor Sage, ed., *The Gothick Novel* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1990), pp. 65-66.

⁵⁸ J. M. S. Tomkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800* (London, Methuen, 1969), p. 206.

secondly romance, which is, in its simplest form, the suspension of the limitations of normal experience, and becomes, in delicate minds, the self-pleasing reverie of thought, shaping ideal forms of grandeur, beauty and happiness. When romance is ejected from the house of literature, it does not die of exposure, but is degraded; it finds shelter somewhere in the baser purlieus of that mansion, performs mean offices, forgets its breeding, and becomes crass and clownish.⁵⁹

While conceding that there was still an appetite for the marvellous in fiction Tomkins notes that any study of eighteenth-century romance writing is complicated by an ambiguity adhering to the definition; that ambiguity has persisted into the twentieth century. A romance in modern terms now predominantly denotes a simple love story, a definition starting to take hold from around the start of the twentieth-century.⁶⁰ Tomkins notes the transference of meaning between the 'romance' and the 'novel'. The novel, a medium originally offering limited content, that drew general critical scorn for its perceived culpability in engendering time-wasting among the serving-classes, gradually embraced more variety, and expanded to become something approaching what we know today, while the romance became a sub-set of popular literature.⁶¹ Romance writing therefore made a transition of meaning from its original understanding as a medieval chivalric narrative, through an account of exciting or sensational events perhaps in a more contemporary setting, until it eventually became analogous with and largely limited to the sphere of romantic love, with its corresponding emotional extremes replacing the sensational aspects of the earlier definitions. For Hugh Walpole and his coterie, romance in the early decades of the twentieth-century still clung on to its transitional meaning of a narrative involving excitement or sensation and the exploration of other worlds of experience and the marvellous.

⁵⁹Tomkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*, p. 206.

⁶⁰ "romance, n. and adj.1". A. n 7. 'A story of romantic love, *esp.* one which deals with love in a sentimental or idealized way; a book, film, etc., with a narrative or story of this kind. Also as mass noun: literature of this kind. 1901-2004', *OED Online*. June 2016. Oxford University Press, at <http://www.oed.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/Entry/167065?rskey=f6a0VH&result=1&isAdvanced=false> [accessed July 07, 2016].

⁶¹ Tomkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*, pp. 209-212.

J. M. S. Tomkins notes that between the death of Tobias Smollett and the rise of Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott the novel is distinguished more for its status as popular entertainment than for its contribution to literature. Tomkins's decision to eschew judgemental criticism, although she notes the inferiority of the works under investigation, in favour of a broad review of what was being read as entertainment, acknowledges an alternative genealogy for the novel based upon reading habits rather than canonicity.⁶² In *Gothic* (2014), Fred Botting charts the shift in fiction from its role as 'a mode of moral instruction' to that of a source of entertainment and pleasure, freeing readers from social constraints.⁶³ Botting observes that cheaper printing processes, the rise of the circulating library, and a growing middle-class reading public, marked a shift in ideas of taste as the production of fiction became market-led; this development brought its own reaction from those concerned with the maintenance of notions of literary value, just as it would in Hugh Walpole's day.⁶⁴ Wordsworth in his Preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) had condemned Gothic literature, observing that the uniformity of existence has produced 'a craving for extraordinary incident', and that the works of Shakespeare and Milton have been driven into neglect, 'by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse'.⁶⁵ Over a century later, Q. D. Leavis suggested 'a taste for novel-reading as distinct from a taste for literature is not altogether desirable' and she, like Tomkins, marked the death of Tobias Smollett as the herald of a new age where 'the circulating library, which now became a symbol for worthless fiction' had to be serviced by the proliferation of the novel.⁶⁶ That the minor fiction produced in the Romantic era has

⁶² Tomkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*, p. 1.

⁶³ Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd edition (Abingdon, Routledge, 2014), p. 43.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads* (London, T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800), p.8, at Prefaces and Prologues. Vol. XXXIX. The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909-14; Bartleby.com, 2001. www.bartleby.com/39/ [accessed 05/12/2015].

⁶⁶ Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 112.

come under closer critical scrutiny, especially with the ascendancy of Gothic studies since the original appearance of *The Popular Novel in England*, does not go unnoticed in Tomkins's preface to later editions, where she notes the 'enhanced significance' of the Gothic Romance since her original work.⁶⁷

Gothic revival

In 1980 David Punter produced what Robert Miles has called 'the first properly cultural study of the Gothic' with *The Literature of Terror*, in which the writer adopted Marxist and Freudian approaches to address the critical neglect of the genre.⁶⁸ From the outset Punter notes that while literary Gothic strictly refers to a group of writings produced between 1760 and 1820, sharing a set of characteristics or tropes, and a significant use of techniques of literary suspense, latterly it has come to cover everything from bodice-ripping historical romance, 'psychic grotesquerie', and supernatural horror fiction.⁶⁹ In his study of Victorian Gothic, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* (2009), questioning whether his own title is a misnomer, Jarlath Killeen argues for 'the sheer generic openness of the Gothic and its ability to migrate and adapt' as well as its transformative powers over 'other genres and narratives while maintaining its own cognitive implications and formal and thematic conventions'.⁷⁰ Gothic fiction can be seen 'as a historically delimited genre or as a more wide-ranging tendency within fiction as a whole', as posited by Punter, or a sort of transhistorical aesthetic as some contemporary critics might prefer.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Tomkins, *The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800*, p. xiii.

⁶⁸ Robert Miles, *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy* (Manchester, MUP, 2002), p. vii.

⁶⁹ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the present day. Vol. 1: The Gothic Tradition* (London, Longman, 1996), pp. 1-3.

⁷⁰ Jarlath Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2009), p.3.

⁷¹ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, p.12.

By the 1980s, when *The Literature of Terror* appeared, the wider world of critical theory had, as Chris Baldick puts it, rediscovered ‘contextual study’ or ‘cultural criticism’.⁷² Punter draws on Raymond Williams’s concept of ‘cultural materialism’ when examining the production and consumption of literary works, and the formation of popular taste that played its part in the rise, and indeed longevity, of Gothic literature.⁷³ What Punter’s chronological study does is stress the continuity of the genre, through its roots, ‘a form into which a huge variety of cultural influences [...] flowed’, and its influence; which obviously it must do if Gothic is not to be simply enshrined as a literary period occupying some dates in and around 1760 to 1820.⁷⁴ Punter’s genealogy of the Gothic traces a line through British folk poetry, ballads, the medieval tradition of Chaucer, the work of Edmund Spenser and the Elizabethans ‘rediscovered’ by the latter end of the eighteenth-century, sentimental fiction, graveyard poetry, and the cult of the sublime; origins which are available to be retraced in most of the studies of the genre.⁷⁵ It is interesting that the Elizabethans were ‘rediscovered’ again in the modernist era, both to provide a counter to Romanticism in T. S. Eliot’s critical formulations, and as robust romantics in Marguerite Steen’s review.

Despite Horace Walpole’s avowed intention to marry romantic creativity with modern naturalism, Punter says that this Walpole actually set out to ‘flout realist conventions’ and that *Otranto* is ‘a fairy-tale rather than a nightmare, even when it strives for the horrific’.⁷⁶ Fred Botting sees the book as an often unhappy marriage of superstitious antiquity and eighteenth-century naturalism which communicates an overarching air of incredulity. He highlights the ambivalence implicit in the relationship between responses to history and encroaching modernity during this stage of the eighteenth-century, and the notion that the

⁷² Chris Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present* (Harlow, Longman, 1996), pp. 178-179.

⁷³ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, pp. 21-23.

⁷⁴ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, p. 87.

⁷⁵ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, pp. 4-40.

⁷⁶ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, pp.44-45.

duty of literature was to reflect the prevailing social order and provide moral direction.⁷⁷

Contemporary critics, while often praising the vigour of *The Castle of Otranto*, and the naturalism of the characters and their language in adversity, deplored it for its triviality and lack of moral purpose. Critics saw Gothic fiction as dangerous, subversive and amoral.

While the villains of Gothic fiction would receive their comeuppance, pursuant to examining the price to be paid for transgression, sins that drew down the greatest retribution could be illustrated fairly graphically, allowing readers to contemplate transgressive behaviour with a suitable sense of moral outrage and satisfaction when justice was seen to be done. J. M. S. Tompkins delineates this behaviour as ‘Satiric indignation’ quoting the preface to Charles Johnstone’s 1781 picaresque *The History of John Juniper*:

There cannot be a stronger argument against the charge of degeneracy in moral virtue and religion brought against the present age, than the avidity with which all works exposing the breaches of them by the unerring proof of facts, are read by all people.⁷⁸

Whether the outrage expressed at Gothic romances was real or feigned this ambiguity of reception highlights a wider ambiguity within the genre, and one already implicit in *The Castle of Otranto* as Fred Botting points out:

Its uncertain tone and style, between seriousness and irony, is perhaps the novel’s cardinal sin and one that is visited in various forms on its literary offspring. Rending the correspondence of representation and reality, gothic fancy and invention were able to construct other worlds that dislocated boundaries between fact and fiction, history and contemporaneity, reality and fantasy.⁷⁹

Hugh Walpole saw Horace Walpole, Mrs Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis striving to ‘create a world altogether distinct from any known one’, and while Radcliffe at least attempted an internal logic with her ‘explained supernatural’, Horace Walpole was more laissez-faire, planting ‘his absurd helmet just where he pleased and you could take it or leave it’:

⁷⁷ Botting, *Gothic*, p. 49.

⁷⁸ Charles Johnstone, *The History of John Juniper* (1781), quoted in Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800*, p.47 (footnote).

⁷⁹ Botting, *Gothic*, pp.44-49.

All the characters in these books spoke an absurd jargon the like of which was never heard on land or sea; they were puppets less natural than the Punch and Judy show, harking back indeed to the old Mystery Plays with their personified Virtues and Vices. They did not attempt to convince their readers of the *truth* of their stories but wished to create a sort of dream-like state in which all the horses had two heads, the villains forked tails under their pantaloons, and the heroines drank nectar and were fed on heavenly dew.⁸⁰

While bemoaning the emphasis on realism and fact in his own era's fiction, Hugh Walpole clearly felt that some attempt should be made to anchor a narrative with internal logic rather than descending into the 'improbable, absurdly hyperbolic kind of writing' that Victor Sage notes was a fundamental of the old romance.⁸¹ Arguably the Gothic authors were aware of their own absurdities. By ironising the chivalric romance in *Don Quixote* (1605), Cervantes had ushered in the modern novel. By layering this new form of experimental romance with disputed authorship, unreliable narrators, doubling, cross-dressing, mistaken identity, incest, and temporal and geographical displacement, the Gothic authors not only acknowledged Shakespeare, Cervantes's contemporary, but created an artificial world which eventually, in Jerrold Hogle's analysis, became the persistent 'symbolic realm' of modern western culture.⁸² Drawing on Julia Kristeva's influential work *Powers of Horror* (1980), Hogle further suggests that the creation of an artificial, self-consciously improbable space, within Gothic literature, provides an environment whereby the grotesque embodiments of primal repression may be abjected or 'thrown-off'.⁸³ Whether this psychological depth to the Gothic romance was always implicit, or has simply been applied retrospectively, is the basis for critical challenges to the efflorescence of the growth of Gothic criticism.

⁸⁰ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

⁸¹ Sage, *The Gothick Novel* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990) p. 9. Subsequent references to Sage are to this title.

⁸² Hogle, p. 2.

⁸³ Hogle, pp. 7-8.

Critical challenges and the Romantic Gothic debate

Within Hugh Walpole's era the prevalent literary judgement had cast Gothic literature into a critical hinterland where it would remain for some time. Despite his youthful enjoyment as a reader, by the evidence of his dismissal of Lewis, Radcliffe and his own ancestor, Walpole seems to have conformed to this early twentieth-century critical view of the Gothic novel. In his praise of Walter Scott's refinement of the romance, Walpole would acknowledge his influence, but he saw no chronological development or thematic continuity between the dream worlds created by the Gothic pioneers, and those worlds of his own imagination. The reappraisal of the Gothic, and Scott's role in bridging the transition between romance and realism, had to wait to receive critical attention. As regards the new status of Gothic texts, the primacy of literary merit as a foundation for judgement has been reasserted in a contemporary challenge to Gothic criticism.

In his study of writing between the wars, *Literature of the 1920s: Writers Among the Ruins* (2012), Chris Baldick ends his introduction by announcing that 'the now-customary quest for premonitions of twenty-first-century values, or for flickers of 'transgression' in literary works of the period, will not be pursued in the following chapters'.⁸⁴ Something of his annoyance with this practice drives Baldick and David Mighall's essay on 'Gothic Criticism' (2001), in which contemporary critics of the Gothic are taken to task for their abandonment of historical perspective in favour of the ideologically-motivated promotion of psychological analysis and political goals.

In a withering attack, the co-authors accuse Gothic Criticism of leading 'the mainstream modernist, postmodernist, and left-formalist campaign against nineteenth-century literary realism and its alleged ideological backwardness'.⁸⁵ Baldick and Mighall maintain that

⁸⁴ Baldick, *Literature of the 1920s*, p.35.

⁸⁵ Chris Baldick and David Mighall 'Gothic Criticism', in *A Companion to the Gothic*, p. 210.

previous disregard or disparagement of much Gothic literature is not down to the repressive tactics of a critical establishment, alarmed by Gothic's exposure of bourgeois anxieties, and fearful of the effect of fantasy literature's liberating energy, but is simply centred on the value judgement that so much of what has been produced within the genre is of inferior quality.

In truth Baldick and Mighall are probably less exercised by questions concerning the literary merit of obscure works resurrected by Gothic Criticism, than they are by what they see as the claims made to legitimise the genre as a whole. The authors note that David Punter places particular emphasis on the poetic origins of Gothic literature, and seeks to establish links with the Romantic Movement, seemingly in order to elevate its critical status. In their view this approach, invoking the spiritual and anti-materialistic strain in Romantic poetry as part of a Gothic chronology, reinforces the nostalgic medievalism of much early Gothic criticism, which is seen to be at odds with the Enlightenment-founded modernity of the genre.⁸⁶ In a recent study, while endorsing Baldick and Mighall's view regarding nostalgia versus modernity, Daniel Darvay finds Gothic antecedents in the religious conflicts of sixteenth-century post-Reformation England, particularly through the establishing of a 'modern' national narrative based upon 'the enemy within'.⁸⁷

Following Punter, rather than emphasising any philosophical congruence, a more obvious link between Gothic and the Romantics is the seemingly shameless way that the so-called 'Big Six', Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Byron, Shelley, and Keats, plundered Gothic tropes even while decrying the Gothic tendency in print. Michael Gamer has defended the apparent duplicity of the Romantics, in their public repudiation of Gothic's low cultural status whilst appropriating its materials, by emphasising the way they used distancing techniques to

⁸⁶ Baldick and Mighall, *A Companion to the Gothic*, pp. 214-215.

⁸⁷ Daniel Darvay, *Haunting Modernity and the Gothic Presence in British Modernist Literature* (London, Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2016), pp. v-vii. Darvay's 'enemy within' (p. 16 & recurring), may be compared with Walpole's 'intruder', to be discussed in the following chapter. It is interesting that Darvay finds Gothic pre-echoes in Elizabethan England and in the English Civil War, the periods that occupied Walpole's late historical fiction.

neutralise its negative connotations, while ‘legitimizing its conventions by self-consciously putting them to acceptably intellectual and ideological uses’.⁸⁸

In 1969 Robert D. Hume, attempting to distinguish between Gothic writing and the Romantic Movement, noted that the Gothic novel had not fared well at the hands of literary critics, receiving only cursory attention, and then marked by indifference or condescension. Hume identifies the ‘psychological interest’ of the Gothic novel and the ‘concern for *interior* mental processes’, and the manner in which writers, by allowing for the free-play of the imagination, and employing techniques to instigate an emotional response in their readers, rather than a moral or intellectual one, set the scene for the Romantic poets.⁸⁹

Considering the distinction between writers of terror and writers of horror, Hume notes that while exponents of the former assume terror opens the reader to an appreciation of the sublime while horror causes only alienation, the advocates of horror believe that, if presented in a psychologically consistent manner, horror will more thoroughly immerse the reader in the events portrayed. Hume traces the development of this approach to an evolution in the reception of concepts of good and evil, from a profound philosophical and practical distinction during the Renaissance, to an ethically ambiguous view some two hundred years later.⁹⁰ Hume notes a transition from the atmospheric dream worlds created by Horace Walpole, Radcliffe and Lewis, to an increasing emphasis on the presentation of the anti-hero. The moral ambivalence and the singular lack of conclusions, as the genre evolved, marking the development of a psychological response to the problem of evil.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Michael Gamer, ‘Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain’, *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, pp. 95-98.

⁸⁹ Robert D. Hume, ‘Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel’, in *PMLA* Vol. 84, No. 2 (March, 1969, pp. 282-290), pp. 283-284, at http://www.jstor.org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/1261285?sid=primo&origin=crossref&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [accessed 03/01/2016]. Subsequent references are to this article at this location.

⁹⁰ Hume, ‘Gothic Versus Romantic’, p. 285.

⁹¹ Hume, ‘Gothic Versus Romantic’, p. 288.

For Hume, while realism concentrates on the concerns of exterior society, Gothic and Romantic writing spring from a shared concern with the interior life of the mind. He contends that it is here, through their shared engagement with the ultimate questions of existence, and their differing responses, that Gothic and the Romantic Movement ultimately diverge. Both Gothic writers and the leaders of the Romantic Movement doubt that the forces of reason or religious faith can explain human existence. The early English Romantics attempt to escape the mundane, and connect with the infinite via nature and the exercise of the imagination, the Gothic writers are bound to earth with their perpetual presentation of the ambiguity and paradox of existence.⁹² Hume claims that Gothic is bound by the exercise of *reason* to the presentation of the rational world, that world of ambiguity and paradox, which it acknowledges as both inexplicable and inescapable. This complicates an understanding of his thesis in that Gothic now seems to be the realm of *unreason*. Hume's use of 'romance' does not designate the Gothic romance but the Romantic imagination, and his differentiation between Romantic imagination and Gothic 'fancy' is as opaque as in its original use by Coleridge.⁹³ For Hume an acceptance of human limitations has curbed the Romantic impulse in the mid-twentieth-century, and Gothic writing is in decline because evil has been 'explained away sociologically', but while Gothic can only confirm the inadequacy of reason or faith, only through the Romantic imagination can the paradoxes of modern life be reconciled and surmounted, or at least the potential to do so be acknowledged.⁹⁴

In responding to, and taking issue with, Hume, Robert L. Platzner notes the 'generic instability of the Gothic', and 'its tendency to decompose into the simpler types of mystery or sentimental romance', and is not convinced by the argument that extends the scope of the genre to include what may latterly be dubbed the 'domestic Gothic' of a novel like *Wuthering*

⁹² Hume, 'Gothic Versus Romantic', pp. 288-289.

⁹³ S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1907), p 202

⁹⁴ Hume, 'Gothic Versus Romantic', p.290.

Heights (1847).⁹⁵ Michael Gamer compares the debate between Hume and Platzner to the debate on the nature of Romanticism between Arthur Lovejoy and René Wellek.⁹⁶ Wellek's unitary approach was countered by Lovejoy whose efforts to recognise the diversity of Romanticism in his essay 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', acknowledges that, 'There is observable, for example, in what it has become the fashion to classify as the early phases of English Romanticism, the emergence of what may be called gothicism, and the curious fact of its partial and temporary fusion with naturalism'.⁹⁷ Drawing predominantly on examples from French and German Romanticism, Lovejoy shows that 'naturalism' in this sense could be used to imply wildness and unbuttoned primitivism, but also unsophisticated simplicity and, by association, plain-speaking.⁹⁸ Paradoxically, what was 'natural' could mean the natural behaviour of man to explore experience, and craft what was in essence artificial. Lovejoy goes on to identify the conflicting definitions of Romanticism: naturalistic yet highly-structured, nostalgic and modern, pagan and driven by Christian morality, to highlight an ambiguity that could as easily be applied to the anachronisms implicit in Gothic criticism.

The categories which it has become customary to use in distinguishing and classifying "movements" in literature or philosophy and in describing the nature of the significant transitions which have taken place in taste and in opinion, are far too rough, crude, indiscriminating – and none of them so hopelessly so as the category "Romantic." It is not any large *complexes of ideas*, such as that term has almost always been employed to designate, but rather certain simpler, diversely combinable, intellectual and emotional components of such complexes, that are the true elemental and dynamic factors in the history of thought and of art; and it is with the genesis, the

⁹⁵ Robert L. Platzner, "'Gothic versus Romantic': a Rejoinder", in *PMLA* Vol. 86, No. 2 (Mar., 1971), p. 267 at <http://www.jstor.org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/pdf/460952.pdf?acceptTC=true> [accessed 11/01/2016]. Subsequent references are to this article at this location.

⁹⁶ Gamer, 'Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain' *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, p. 85.

⁹⁷ Arthur O. Lovejoy 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', *PMLA*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Jun., 1924), p. 242, at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/457184> [accessed 07/02/2017]. Subsequent references are to this article at this location.

⁹⁸ Lovejoy here uses 'naturalism' in quite a different sense to the French naturalism of the late nineteenth-century, as pioneered by Emile Zola, which was markedly opposed to Romanticism.

vicissitudes, the manifold and often dramatic interactions of these, that it is the task of the historian of ideas in literature to become acquainted.⁹⁹

Considering German Romanticism between 1797 and 1800 Lovejoy contends that looking to the future, that strand of Romanticism concerned with the apprehension of a world of infinite possibility, came with a concomitant retrospection inclined to the mediaeval, 'A belief in progress and a spirit of reaction were, paradoxically, twin offspring of the same idea, and were nurtured for a time in the same minds'.¹⁰⁰ While this observation accurately delineates Gothic fiction of the time it also seems to sum up the paradoxes later to be found within the philosophy of modernism, as well as Hugh Walpole's own efforts to find an accommodation between tradition and modern thinking.

Michael Gamer records Robert Platzner's challenge to Hume whereby he highlighted the vagueness of terms like 'Gothic' and 'Romantic', conceding a sharing of themes but with differing objectives, and notes that Platzner's challenge to fixed generic categories accords with the current view of the Gothic as a genre-crossing aesthetic.¹⁰¹ Thus, the generic instability that Platzner identified, is compatible with the 'generic openness' that Jarlath Killeen saw as allowing the Gothic to adapt and migrate, while it appropriated other genres and narratives.¹⁰² Platzner also feels the distinction between terror and horror is irrelevant, and that what particularly distinguishes Gothic from other fantasy writing is its rediscovery of a belief in the reality and prevalence of evil, that the Enlightenment had previously successfully challenged. Terror becomes the 'subjective mirroring of an objective state', and the Gothic revelation is that 'evil is *constitutive* of reality'.¹⁰³ It may be that it was this engagement with the matter of evil that allowed the Gothic to escape from its original narrow

⁹⁹ Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', p. 242.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Gamer, 'Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain', *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁰² Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914*, p.3.

¹⁰³ Platzner, "'Gothic versus Romantic': a Rejoinder", p. 267.

time-constrained definition, a mode within the wider Romantic movement, by infiltrating other genres and creating its monstrous aesthetic.

It was Baldick and Mighall's contention that the Gothic, with its scepticism and parodic elements intact, heralded the 'birth of modernity', rather than displaying a nostalgic yearning for an imagined medieval past, unconstrained by Enlightenment rationality.¹⁰⁴ Given this assessment it would appear that, following his ancestor Horace's lead, Hugh Walpole's forays into genre writing offered his best chance to merge traditional English prose with a modern psychological approach. Walpole's ambition would obviously involve a balancing act, as alongside the desire to be modern, he expressed nostalgia for a time before the novel became 'too precious and sanctified', and was still 'a jolly, human, lively thing'.¹⁰⁵ That this act of harmony might be achieved was suggested by the career of his hero Walter Scott.

The watershed

Victor Sage in his introduction to the critical anthology *The Gothick Novel* (1990) marks 1820 as both an ending for a literary cult and a watershed. 1818 had seen the publication of *Frankenstein*, which arguably suggested a whole new direction for Gothic romance, but also Jane Austen's debunking of the more gullible aspects of the romantic sensibility in *Northanger Abbey*. Critical mauilings for Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* in 1820, included the observation, compatible with de Sade, that a literary generation that had experienced the upheaval of the Napoleonic Wars could not have been expected to deal with mundane events in their fictions; a tacit suggestion that Gothic was now out of date since social and political stability had returned.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Baldick and Mighall, *A Companion to the Gothic*, p.220

¹⁰⁵ Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, pp. ix-x.

¹⁰⁶ Sage, pp. 18-19.

If Victor Sage's editorial in *The Gothick Novel* suggests that Gothic romance was once seen as having simply run out of steam, in *Romantic Misfits* (2012) Robert Miles points out that the romantic novel became sidelined critically due to the prominence afforded poetry, as 'Romanticism was uniquely pared down to a singularity of gender and genre, to a corpus of six male poets'.¹⁰⁷ The categorisation that Miles here identifies is part of the overall periodisation of literature that so often excludes while it classifies; Miles highlights the perversity of this practice in that the romantic-era novel was very popular, and in the process of consolidation as a commercially viable form from the latter end of the eighteenth century.

Miles identifies the eventual emergence of the two British 'World-historical writers' who gave the lie to the notion of the romantic era novel as being one of mediocrity, namely Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott.¹⁰⁸ Both these two, striving within different genres, were concerned with narrative probability, and both in their own way were to prefigure the modern novel, even as Scott transformed the romantic novel and Austen defined the realistic novel of manners, heralding nascent modernity, and what Miles refers to as 'the aesthetic revolution'.¹⁰⁹ Victor Sage sees Scott, as critic and as novelist, naturalising superstition, allowing for the excesses of the Gothic 'when they are obviously symptomatic of an earlier stage of culture'; and ushering in an era where romance is subordinate to 'historical or psychological probability'.¹¹⁰ With his novel *Waverley* (1814), initially published anonymously, Scott anchored his version of romance in a specific period, the second Jacobite uprising of 1745, thereby establishing an interest in historical narrative as opposed to the arcane trappings of an imagined past. While he was certainly not averse to the rendering of supernatural events these were acknowledged as being woven into the cultural fabric of those past times, and were presented with a scepticism provided by distance. In illustrating this

¹⁰⁷ Miles, *Romantic Misfits*, p. 133.

¹⁰⁸ Miles, *Romantic Misfits*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁹ Miles, *Romantic Misfits*, p. 135.

¹¹⁰ Sage, p. 19.

method, David Punter cites a sequence from *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) where Scott uses a distancing technique to introduce a supernatural manifestation, switching from direct narrative to an interjection of the authorial voice which creates an air of scepticism. Punter's contention is that Scott's use of realism makes his invented world internally logical, just as his concentration upon his characters' motivation prevents the narrative being overwhelmed by Gothic or romantic interludes. Where he does make use of Gothic and romantic tropes, 'one feels the pressure of the undoubted sanity of the narrator acting to rob the phantasm of its terrors'.¹¹¹ Louis Cazamian says that Scott brings Romanticism within the scope of the everyday, giving it 'an average and normal value, a soundness, an immunity from any feverishness'.¹¹² Hugh Walpole declares that the author 'carried the Romantic novel to great heights because he worked in it as a realist' and, more prosaically, that 'He was a realist working in a romantic world, a poet transforming a realistic world'.¹¹³ This invocation of realism brings with it as much ambiguity as that of romance.

Truth, realism, and romance

Hugh Walpole asserts that the Gothic pioneers, his ancestor Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis and Mrs Radcliffe, unlike Walter Scott, made no attempt to convince their readers of the truth of their stories, presenting instead a fallacious dream-world. Walpole is not concerned with the presentation of a debateable 'realism'; 'reality' in fiction, and the 'realist' novel, are oxymorons, and 'reality' itself only ever a reflection of a consensus view. When Walpole writes of the truth of a story, he appears to mean an internal credibility which will persuade the reader to accept the conceits of the narrative, in that often-quoted 'suspension of disbelief'.

¹¹¹ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, pp. 143-144.

¹¹² Cazamian, *Modern Times (1660—1940)*, in Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, *A History of English Literature*, p. 1027.

¹¹³ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

Considering the trends in realist fiction, Hugh Walpole saw the growth of critical theory from the latter part of the nineteenth-century to be responsible for the emergence of authorial self-consciousness, which in his view was a bad thing, and responsible not only for a confusion over what the novel was, but for a diminution in ‘creative zest’.¹¹⁴ That the novel began to draw critical attention at that time is consistent with its newly-found status, as noted by Ian Duncan:

Scarcely regarded as ‘Literature’ at the beginning of the century, by 1850 in Britain the novel was the ascendant form for the representation of a national cultural identity. The novel could offer a panoramic and historical imitation of the life of the people, and something more: a criticism of that life.¹¹⁵

What Duncan goes on to stress however, is the centrality of romance to the history of the novel and the importance of plot, even as the novel began to be concerned with an accurate reflection of that chimera ‘real life’. With criticism becoming increasingly determined that ‘serious’ literature should reflect consensus reality much prose fiction was overlooked in the process.

That the novel has somehow become stale, depending for novelty on its success, and overly concerned with a realistic portrayal of a realistic world, due in part to the growing influence of the literary theorist, is something Walpole turns to repeatedly. He also feels that the novel with its new emphasis is missing purpose; ‘With the desire for truth came naturally a horror of any implied morality, for the artist must never be the moralist if he can avoid it – that he can never avoid it was a misfortune that no one very clearly perceived’.¹¹⁶ Prior to 1870, in Walpole’s thesis, the English Novel was not ‘Art’ it was popular and accessible, even when it displayed a moral responsibility. By the 1890s, and goaded by a critical movement originating in France, the English Novel had become inclusive of subject-matter and

¹¹⁴ Walpole, *The English Novel: Some Notes on its Evolution. The Rede Lecture 1925* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1925), p.12.

¹¹⁵ Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, p. xxxiv.

concerned with form. Walpole also takes the opportunity to comment on the restrictions that fealty to realism might place upon an author:

The determination too that it (the English novel) should tell the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth, forced it into becoming very careful of its Subject. You can only tell the truth when you are quite certain of the facts and you can only be certain of your facts in the positive recognition of your own personal experience.¹¹⁷

Walpole sees this obsession with fact or ‘truth’ militating against moral judgement, something he sees as unavoidable in literature. Deploring what he sees as the cult of novelty and the condemnation of the bestseller, he claims novel-reading has been transformed over the previous century: while the majority still read novels for pleasure, the minority do so as the equivalent of wearing an ‘aesthetic hair-shirt’.¹¹⁸ It is pertinent that Walpole makes these observations in his introduction to an anthology illustrating the narrative gifts of Walter Scott. Scott was decidedly out of fashion then, but Walpole hoped his star would rise again:

These things run in cycles; we are just now all for sophistication, for technique and arrangement and for a proper dignity in letters, but some day some one will come along who will clear away a little of the clambering ivy and the twisting weeds that have grown thick about that splendid old building. An enormous amount of critical self-satisfied *cliché* has to be thrown away, and then with a new view there will be astonishment, I fancy, for a good many people.¹¹⁹

Notwithstanding the grandiloquence of Walpole’s sentiment, the requisite landscaping has latterly been performed, and Scott has been reclaimed. The notion that commercial and critical appeal could be combined, something of a Holy Grail for Walpole during his career, was, superficially at least, considered to be anathema to highbrows. Scott’s success therefore becomes a model for Walpole’s ambition.

Scott’s metafiction and legacy

Walpole pays tribute to Scott as the standard-bearer of a narrative tradition and for his ability to create characters. An aspect of Scott that Walpole almost keeps at arm’s-length, for the

¹¹⁷ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, p. xxxiv.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Walpole, *Reading*, p. 23.

most part treating it as evidence of the author's whimsical nature, are those incidences of authorial intrusion which subvert the concept of the omniscient narrator. Given that the invisibility of the author marked the gold standard for modernist prose fiction, it is tempting to see all of Scott's interventions as being in the same 'Dear Reader' tradition as practiced by Fielding and Thackeray, and open to the criticism levelled at the Romantics for their subjectivity. In fact, while Scott certainly used his authorial voice to tell rather than show, he also built upon his original anonymity as the author of *Waverley* (1814) to step outside of his narrative, playing with the whole concept of authorship in his Prefaces and Introductions, as well as in anonymous reviews of his own novels. In *The Betrothed* (1825) Scott introduces a host of authors, prefacers and editors, forming a joint stock company for the production of the Waverley novels, and in a sequence of multiple endings and editorial 'stings' at the conclusion of *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), Scott creates an almost Brechtian mood of alienation. Scott's approach can be compared with Walpole, who in defiance of modernist thinking, comments as an omniscient narrator on his characters' lives beyond the pages of the novels in which they appear, or inserts himself into his own stories in a variety of literary guises. Walpole is the writer Campbell, who takes on the highbrows at the literary party in *The Young Enchanted* (1921), the self-satisfied novelist and 'old boy' who bores the scholars at prize-giving in *Jeremy at Crale* (1927), and Bauman, the unseen writer of 'Lakeland novels' whose mere existence infuriates Colonel Fawcus in *A Prayer for My Son* (1936).

While Hugh Walpole celebrates Scott's blend of romance and realism, and his assertion of traditional techniques, it is the originality of what Scott was doing in his own time and its interest to modern critics that has guaranteed his posterity. Going even further, Ted Underwood has claimed that the historical contrast presented in Scott's novels inspired the

way English Literature was to be taught.¹²⁰ A knowledge of the past, of history, is only possible through an awareness of perspective; as Scott writes, and Underwood quotes, ‘Like those who drift down a deep and smooth river, we are not aware of the progress we have made, until we fix our eye on the now distant point from which we have been drifted’.¹²¹ Underwood contends that Scott’s vivid recreation of the social milieu of previous eras in his fiction inspired the close examination of literary periods in the teaching of English, as well as the teaching of specific periods in taught History; a move away, in both disciplines, from the attempt to cover the sweep of history in order to emphasise continuous progress. Underwood also compares Arthur Lovejoy’s identification of Romantic discontinuity, with the reaffirmation of the cultural unity of Romanticism as espoused by René Wellek. Lovejoy, having acknowledged the disunity of cultural movements, suggested that the components of such movements should be identified and compared to trace genetic influences. Wellek’s approach sought to emphasise the study of literature as an autonomous discipline, distinct from the study of history, and solidly founded upon periodisation.¹²² This increased specialisation, designed to allow for the enhancement of empathy with previous eras, in order to forge a stronger sense of continuity than that suggested by mere chronological development, would inevitably lead to a necessary compression in the period under review, a set of core texts in the case of literary periods, the emergence of a canon, and the exclusion of whatever did not fit in.

Victor Sage marked Scott’s intervention into prose as a watershed, a point where romance writing could move on from a hyperbolic Gothic literature that had potentially run out of steam, a situation that arguably reflected a calmer international political situation. But Sage is careful to stress that this was metamorphosis not death, with ‘the scattering and

¹²⁰ Underwood, pp. 81-113.

¹²¹ Walter Scott, *Waverley or ‘Tis Sixty Years Hence, Vol. II* (London, Heron Books, undated ca. 1970), p. 364.

¹²² Underwood, pp. 114-136.

transmutation of the tangible literary form into a mode of sensibility'.¹²³ If recent political turmoil had been reflected in the extremes of the Gothic form, David Punter notes that following the cessation of the hostilities associated with the war with France, the period 1815-1827 saw the rise of what Hazlitt dubbed 'silver fork' fiction, fashionable fiction concerned with the activities of the aristocracy. Punter suggests that such fiction offered a guide in manners compatible with the social aspirations of an emergent bourgeoisie and this marked a context of much wider social change.¹²⁴ Following a World War, Hugh Walpole's own fiction reacted to living through a period of transition, by presenting a social milieu reminiscent of silver fork fiction, a declining cash-strapped aristocracy and a middle-class facing its own aspirations and exigencies, within novels of modern romance. As if emphasising the fact that literature is not really composed of conveniently exclusive self-contained periods, swimming alongside the uncritical charting of marital relations and aristocratic mores within the original silver fork tradition was its censorious neighbour, the so-called 'penny dreadful'.¹²⁵

Punter notes of Walter Scott that he 'reinterprets history in terms of the interest of an increasingly democratic age in the effects of society on a wide range of classes and types of individual', and this influence can be determined in the work of four other writers who followed Scott's lead.¹²⁶ Edward Bulwer Lytton, G.P.R. James, William Harrison Ainsworth and G.W.M. Reynolds, like Scott, set their romantic narratives within specific eras of history, but were not prepared to entirely abandon the symbolic Gothic realms of Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe. All four of these writers had a high degree of political involvement; while

¹²³ Sage, *The Gothick Novel*, p. 22.

¹²⁴ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, p.146.

¹²⁵ See Judith Flanders, 'Penny Dreadfuls', 'Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians', British Library Online, 15 May, 2014, at <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/penny-dreadfuls> [accessed 26/07/2020].

¹²⁶ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol 1, p. 152. The most influential argument concerning Scott's use of history may be found in György Lukács influential work *The Historical Novel* (Russia, 1937) (First English translation: London, Merlin Books, 1962).

Gothic villains such as Radcliffe's bandit chiefs, or the doomed transgressors of classic Gothic fiction, had always been prominent, alongside aristocratic outcasts attention was now being paid to the criminal classes, with the suggestion that their sociopathic tendencies derived from their social circumstances. Bulwer Lytton and Ainsworth were prominent in the controversy surrounding the so-called Newgate Novels, being accused of glamorising the lives of criminals in works like Lytton's *Paul Clifford* (1830) and *Eugene Aram* (1833), and Ainsworth's 'faction' *Rookwood* (1834) and *Jack Sheppard* (1839). Lytton also featured seekers after esoteric knowledge in proto-science fiction works, anticipating H. P. Lovecraft and Edgar Rice Burroughs, in his books *Zanoni* (1842), and *The Coming Race* (1871). G.P.R. James was an historian heavily influenced by Scott, who by harkening back to a tradition of chivalric romance, appeared to address some deficiency in the lives of an increasingly middle-class reading-public who were forging a society founded on industry and commerce. The prolific Reynolds produced the outright gothicism of *Wagner the Wehr-wolf* (1846-7), and the long-running serialisation *The Mysteries of London* (1844-48).

Punter makes a claim for Lytton, Ainsworth and Reynolds creating a 'proletarian gothic', not only by charting the exploits of career criminals but by being attuned to public taste, a taste largely condemned as being deplorable but popular nevertheless.¹²⁷ The depiction of the sordid and unsavoury side of life in the lower strata of society has a political dimension, particularly for Reynolds who seeks to 'expose these horrors as consequent upon a hierarchical social organisation' and show that 'if the lower classes are corrupted, it is because of chronic poverty and oppression'.¹²⁸ The relative obscurity of Reynolds, and his virtual excising from literary history, may in Punter's opinion have been due to his radicalism, or to the fact that the way he communicated his message was by explicitly

¹²⁷ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, pp. 146-147.

¹²⁸ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, Vol. 1, p. 159.

charting extreme depths of depravity in his writing. More successful in combining post-Gothic horror with campaigning radicalism was Reynolds's contemporary Charles Dickens, who managed to achieve the delicate balancing-act of commercial and critical success while confronting his audience with unpalatable truths about their society. In this popular fiction of the Victorian era, rather than the romantic 'anaemia' detected by Marguerite Steen, there is a combination of Gothic imagery with social realism to a moral purpose.

Hugh Walpole suggests that there was much to envy about the reader of the popular novel of the 1840s. The vitality of the form had not been sapped through the self-consciousness of its authors, and its public, insulated by a dearth of literary criticism, shared a conviction about its content: 'right was intended to triumph, wrong to be ruthlessly defeated, and the difference between right and wrong was so clear that nobody could possibly mistake it'.¹²⁹ This compared to his own time with its 'almost pathetic determination that no book shall be guilty of a moral purpose'.¹³⁰ To offer a slight counter to Walpole's observation, it is worth noting that writers such as Lytton, Ainsworth, James, and Reynolds, as well as Dickens, had to wait for the ascendancy of literary criticism to afford them the critical status to match the popular status they enjoyed during their writing careers.

Victorian Gothic

David Punter notes that the scandalised Press reaction to the explicit horrors evoked by Lytton, Reynolds, and Dickens, and the Victorian sensationalists, 'shows a wilful confusion of moral and formal categories' and a disregard for 'the validity and power of forms of writing which do not acquiesce in an established definition of realism'; this despite the implicit moral message conveyed by the work.¹³¹ In something like a hundred years the

¹²⁹ Walpole, *Reading*, pp. 83-84.

¹³⁰ Walpole, *Reading*, p. 84.

¹³¹ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*: Vol. 1, pp. 194-195.

Gothic form had, while modifying its constituent elements, abandoned the fairytale aspects that Hugh Walpole found so unconvincing, and introduced a moral purpose to temper the genre's admittedly persistent ambiguity. Punter also suggests that for a predominantly middle-class audience, anxiety surrounding the activities of the aristocracy, which permeated the original Gothic, was now joined by an anxiety about the intentions of the working-classes; however serial publication and wider literacy did contribute to the democratising of the form, as had a greater awareness among authors of the requirements of a varied audience. While something like the traditional Gothic persisted in the work of Sheridan Le Fanu, whose early work also showed the influence of Scott, Wilkie Collins' flirtation with Gothic tropes now pointed the way to the detective novel and the thrilling tale of adventure. Punter finds in Le Fanu's understatement, his symbolic density and the way in which 'the Gothic is pared down to psychological essentials' a signpost to the decadent era and beyond.¹³²

As Jarlath Killeen notes, 'To us, the Victorian age *is* the Gothic age', an impression garnered in part through the influence of popular misconceptions of history, mid-twentieth century liberalism's desire for a context of contrast, and cinematic imagery of the 'Hammer Horror' variety.¹³³ Certainly two of the defining texts of the transmuted Gothic, to compare with *Frankenstein* (1818) and *The Vampyre* (1819), date from this period, in Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Stoker's *Dracula* (1897); conversely Punter suggests that these two, and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), with their particular interest in decadence, owe their popularity more to the creation of individual 'myths' than as classic examples of a genre.¹³⁴

Although he does not reference Max Nordau's apocalyptic text *Degeneration* (1892), Punter relates the Gothic writing of the decadent period to a concern with cultural and individual

¹³² Punter, *The Literature of Terror*: Vol. 1, pp. 200-207.

¹³³ Killeen, *Gothic Literature 1825-1914*, p.4.

¹³⁴ Punter, *The Literature of Terror*: Vol. 1, pp. 200-2001.

decline.¹³⁵ Powerful motifs concerning the potential for regression are harnessed by Stevenson in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, and H. G. Wells in *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896), but these themes also infected the adventure novels of H. Rider Haggard allowing for the positing of an ‘Imperial Gothic’, as outlined by Patrick Brantlinger, in which Victorian cultural anxieties, including the fragility of Empire, are exported to a Gothicised Africa.¹³⁶ Works like *Dracula*, and Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897), can be seen within a narrative of ‘reverse colonisation’, where Gothicised colonial ducks come home to roost, in the person of that staple of Gothic critical theory the ‘other’.¹³⁷

The standard Gothic Criticism view of this Victorian Gothic chronology has been challenged by Nicholas Daly who sees the late Victorian romance revival as the dawn of a popular modernism. Daly identifies an undifferentiated literary market at the start of the twentieth century, soon to be disrupted by the fragmentation into concepts of ‘serious’ and ‘popular’ literature. Daly’s contention is that popular romance fiction ‘takes over from the domestic realist novel as the narrative flagship of middle-class Britain’ and that ‘Far from providing mere light entertainment [...] popular fiction filled an important cultural role in turn-of-the-century Britain’.¹³⁸ Without burrowing too deeply into Daly’s thesis, he presents popular fiction as being fiction for a middle-class reading public, produced by middle-class authors, in which is discerned an illustrative or indeed educative interpretation of cultural change, which in consequence defines it as ‘modernist’. In Daly’s contention, somewhat simplified here, the vampire hunters assembled around Van Helsing, in Bram Stoker’s

¹³⁵ Punter, *The Literature of Terror: Volume 2: The Modern Gothic* (Harlow, Longman, 1996), p. 1.

¹³⁶ Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988). For a discussion of fin de siècle anxiety in popular Victorian adventure fiction see my ‘Death Cults in Gothic ‘Lost World’ fiction’, Ch. 8, in Carol Margaret Davison ed. *The Gothic and Death* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017).

¹³⁷ The above brief textual reference to ‘the other’ hardly does justice to a complex field of study, for a recent discussion see Afaf Ahmed Al-Saidi, ‘Post-colonialism Literature the Concept of self and the other in Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians*: An Analytical Approach’, *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 95-105, January 2014, at: DOI:10.4304/jltr.5.1.95-105 [accessed 23/09/2020].

¹³⁸ Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the fin de siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 4.

Dracula (1897), may be seen as the introduction, or celebration, of a professional class with certain skill sets or knowledge, which enables them to achieve their goals. *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) might serve the same purpose, while accommodating imperial expansion and emergent consumerism. For Daly, the 'romance revival' is not the continuation of a romantic tradition but a new distinctly modern phenomenon compatible with literary modernism. Looking ahead, it is thus possible to view Hugh Walpole's construction of the romance in the early twentieth century in the same terms, as an attempt to illustrate and explain contemporary cultural change to his readers, while entertaining them. Walpole's contribution could then be considered both in terms of an alternative modernism, or as an alternative to modernism.

Twilight, or Golden Dawn?

This chapter has attempted to follow a chronological development of romance writing broadly compatible with that favoured by Gothic Studies, in order to place Hugh Walpole in a specific romantic tradition. Nicholas Daly's argument offers an alternative view of the development of the modern popular romance novel. Walpole was dismissive of the Gothic tradition established by his ancestor Horace, and by Matthew Lewis and Ann Radcliffe, because of its fairytale aspect and its divorce from reality. Walpole believed not in an allegorical dreamlike world populated by puppets but a realistic world transformed by the poetry of romance as in the work of Scott. Scott transformed the Gothic romance for a modern audience and his legacy was the continuing mutation of the form allowing for its eventual generic divergence. Gothic Criticism sees themes of anxiety and repression as culturally present within Gothic romance from the outset, and consequently is able to discern Gothic tropes in the work of, say, Joseph Conrad and T. S. Eliot, and claim them for an

aesthetic of Gothic Modernism.¹³⁹ Nicholas Daly finds that same anxiety and repression to be a shared response to cultural upheaval, in the work of both modernists and the writers of fin de siècle popular fiction, and quite distinct from a tradition of Gothic romance. In *The Crystal Box* Hugh Walpole gnomically refers to Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and *Tarzan* (1914) by Edgar Rice Burroughs, as 'these two masterpieces' but declines the opportunity to take his observation on compatible cultural worth any further.¹⁴⁰ Well-argued and seductive as Daly's theory is, the notion that the romance fiction he cites represents a response to cultural change at the fin de siècle, does not preclude it from still being a part of an ever-developing Gothic romantic tradition. Modern it may be, but rather than Daly's newly emergent phenomenon, arguably it was simply yet another mutation in the continuing evolution of the Gothic romance.

As noted, while there appears to be a correspondence between the stated literary ambitions of Horace Walpole in 1764 and Hugh Walpole in 1926 there are also striking similarities between the peak of the original Gothic novel, 1760-1820, which *The Castle of Otranto* ushered in, and the era within which Hugh Walpole felt critically unappreciated for his championing of the romance. Chris Baldick has drawn a comparison between the critical landscape of the modernist revolution, located between the two world wars, and that of the early decades of the nineteenth century. Historically both periods were marked by warfare, and attendant political and social disruption, and both critical revolutions were driven 'by poets clearing a public space for their own innovations in verse', the so-called Big Six in the Romantic era and Eliot and Pound and their circle in the modernist period.¹⁴¹ Clemence Dane also saw links between the early twentieth-century and the Romantic era, when she

¹³⁹ See Chapter Four.

¹⁴⁰ Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, p. 128.

¹⁴¹ Baldick, *Criticism and Literary Theory 1890 to the Present*, p. 64.

argued the case for Walpole being an innovator working within a tradition, combining stories about recognisable characters with the novel of ideas.

At the beginning of the last century there was indeed a definite attempt to add symbolism to the make-up of the traditive novel: and it is, I suppose, because of the similarity in the condition of the European soil and conscience before, during, and after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, and its condition after the Russian Revolution and the Great War, that the experiment is now being repeated. In each case symbolism was literature's attempt to relate at one and the same time the history of an idea and the history of a human being.¹⁴²

Equally, the period of 1880-1940 has been identified by Phillip Van Doren Stern as a 'Golden Age' for 'weird fiction', a time span coincidentally congruent with Hugh Walpole's own lifetime of 1884 to 1941.¹⁴³ Despite Walpole's complaints about this 'realistic' and 'unmystical period', romance was well-represented, particularly in the second decade of the century.¹⁴⁴ As well as the fantastic fiction of Lord Dunsany, Arthur Machen, and Algernon Blackwood, and the widely-practised supernatural ghost story, there were romances such as John Cowper Powys's 'Wessex' novels, Sylvia Townsend Warner's romantic fantasies, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), philosophical science-fiction such as David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (1920), E. V. Odle's scientific romance *The Clockwork Man* (1923), or more outré fictions like David Garnett's *Lady Into Fox* (1922) and John Collier's *His Monkey Wife* (1930). The fantasy and romance genres seem alive and well even on the basis of these few examples. As for a sea-change in literary technique, the continuing importance of story and plot is stressed by E. M. Forster in *Aspects of the Novel*, as is his perhaps surprising claim that the element of fantasy is as important to the work of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence as it was to William Beckford or Walter de la Mare.¹⁴⁵ The public face of modernism may have been anti-romantic as Hugh Walpole's complaints attest, but the notion that modernism was the preeminent cultural correlative to its era, or that a modernist

¹⁴² Dane, pp. 72-73.

¹⁴³ S. T. Joshi, *The Evolution of the Weird Tale* (New York, Hippocampus Press, 2004), p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Walpole, and Clemence Dane, *Claude Houghton*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Forster, pp.102-103.

literature, based upon a reductive presentation of hard facts, drove nails into the coffin of romance, does not bear close scrutiny.

This chapter has considered a tradition of gothic romance writing as an influence upon Hugh Walpole's own output, and with Chapter One's review of literary modernism has provided the contexts within which he plied his craft. The next chapters will look more closely at the literary texts he produced within these contexts.

PART TWO
Social Histories and Genre Writing
Chapter Three: A New England

Alongside Walpole's intention to pursue the novel in its traditional form, while acknowledging modern techniques in his writing, he had a wider ambition, as he explained in the prefaces written to accompany the Cumberland Edition of his novels, first published by Macmillan in 1934. The intention had been to create a fictional world to represent English life in the opening decades of the new century. Prior to examining how he set about that project, it seems appropriate to spend a little time establishing Walpole's cultural status.

The Cumberland Edition

In 1934 Macmillan republished twenty-five of Hugh Walpole's books in a uniform Cumberland Edition, sans the historical 'Herries' titles, *Rogue Herries* (1930), *Judith Paris* (1931), *The Fortress* (1932), and *Vanessa* (1933, with newly written prefaces, and at 'a popular price'.¹ This edition is a primary source for this study, both for the texts themselves and for Walpole's prefatory comments, in which he recalls the circumstances of the various books' production and constructs his image as their author. The production of this edition may be seen as serving a variety of purposes. First of all, it allowed Macmillan to assert a retrospectively proprietorial claim to the Hugh Walpole name, as his early novels had been published by Smith Elder, Mills & Boon, and Martin Secker. Secondly, it might be seen as a reward to a favoured author, given the prestige attached to a new comprehensive edition of the collected works. Macmillan would do something similar five years later when collecting the four historical novels in the Herries saga, absent from the Cumberland Edition, as *The*

¹ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 142. Macmillan reprinted new titles in an expanding Cumberland Edition in subsequent years, *All Soul's Night* (1933) and *Captain Nicholas* (1934) appeared in 1937, *The Inquisitor* (1935) in 1938, and so on.

Herries Chronicle.² Walpole was a favoured author, in December of 1938 he became the first writer on Macmillan's roster to be invited as guest of honour at the annual dinner hosted by the directors for their staff.³ Finally, and by no means least, there is the raw commercial motive of generating a further income stream from an existing product. As early as 1928 Walpole had acknowledged his gratitude to Macmillan, modifying his slight disappointment with the initial sales of *Wintersmoon* by noting that they not only sold his new books but continued to sell the old ones as well.⁴

The Walpole name may be seen as a sort of brand, marketed as a sign of literary quality and generating sales through a loyal readership. If, as Roland Barthes asserts, rereading is 'an operation contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society', then Macmillan must have been confident in their market, given that the books already existed in a variety of formats, ranging from the original full-price standard editions, to later cheaper reprints such as those from the Everyman Library.⁵ Charles Morgan, in his history of the publisher *The House of Macmillan* (1943), makes some acknowledgement of the economic privations affecting the book market following the end of the 1914-18 War and continuing after the Wall Street Crash of 1929:

The general rule appeared to be that, though taste had not degenerated, the public was looking anxiously from bookshelf to purse and buying in a changed spirit. Even highly priced books were bought willingly if their contents and the public's need to read them were felt to justify the price. What could no longer be sold easily were costly books whose value was chiefly decorative or whose material was available elsewhere.⁶

² Hart-Davis, pp. 402, 414, & 416.

³ Hart-Davis, p. 399.

⁴ Sir Hugh Seymour Walpole, author: Correspondence with Macmillan and Co.: 1916-1941, n.d. Four Volumes, in British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), items 178-179. Subsequent references are to this archive.

⁵ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002), p. 15.

⁶ Charles Morgan, *The House of Macmillan (1843-1943)* (London, Macmillan, 1943), p. 227.

1934, the year of the Cumberland Edition issue, had seen only a slight recovery in the UK from the effects of the worldwide economic depression triggered by the Crash of 1929. The Crash itself, from a reading of Rupert Hart-Davis's biography of the author, or indeed from a reading of the novels, seems to have had little personal impact on Walpole himself.

Morgan's comments on Macmillan's cautious publishing policy only go to stress just how saleable Hugh Walpole was. The novels comprising the Cumberland Edition were both decoratively presented, and already available, and yet Macmillan still anticipated a demand, admittedly with a 'popular price' as noted above. One sees Walpole's audience being drawn from a middlebrow middle-class, engaged with the author in a transaction of mutual reinforcement, collecting the volumes of the Cumberland Edition to announce something about their intellectual aspirations. This reading is compatible with the relationship suggested by John Middleton Murry, when he suggested Walpole's readership as occupying 'a slightly superior social order' to that of other popular novelists.⁷ Meanwhile, the books themselves fulfilled the admirable function that Anthony Powell would later describe in the title of his novel *Books Do Furnish a Room* (1971).

Writing in 1941 in the midst of another World War, Walpole would optimistically attempt to imagine a world to come. He saw the future as being middle class, claiming that nine-tenths of the British population already occupied that bracket and that within fifty years it would account for its entirety. He argued: 'This same Middle Class is middle-brow in all its ideas, aspirations, proclivities'; which encompassed privacy, property-owning, access to education, religious and political tolerance, and free speech.⁸ By 1941 Walpole is long-established as some sort of totemic figure for that middlebrow middle-class. The writer/reader relationship here described is cultivated within the modern world's elevation of

⁷ John Middleton Murry, 'The Case of Hugh Walpole', in *Nation and Athenaeum* (London, England), XXIX (July 16, 1921), p. 584. Subsequent references are to this article in this periodical except where stated.

⁸ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 25-26.

the whole notion of authorship, and the commodification of literature, a situation described in Roland Barthes 'The Death of the Author'.⁹ The success of the relationship, commercial and personal, is naturally dependent upon what the author is 'selling' to his readers, and that is what this study will be attempting to address.

The writer as social commentator

Walpole suggested that people probably read novels for their representation of past social conditions.¹⁰ His own attempts to document in fiction the first three decades of twentieth-century England have a narrowed social perspective, featuring the lives of impoverished aristocrats, and the economically and morally discomfited lower-upper-middle-classes of Orwell's coinage.¹¹ This snapshot of England between the Wars risked being out-of-date almost as soon as it reached print. Walpole knew this, remarking how *The Duchess of Wrexhe* (1914) appeared 'historical' when he revisited it in the 1930s.¹² Even more drastic than this, a year before its publication, Walpole writes in the dedication to *The Green Mirror* (1918) that the book belongs 'in style and method and subject, to a day that seems to us already old-fashioned'.¹³ His point is that the novels are rendered out-of-date by the pace of social and cultural change; but while Walpole claimed to be aware of modern techniques, he remained loyal to the traditional style, method, and subjects that were destined to date his work.

Another example of Walpole's narrow perspective, his documenting of the 'battle of the brows' within his own literary and artistic milieu, is illuminating for the purposes of this study, but not immediately obvious as a source of interest to a wide readership at the time.

As Walpole noted, people weren't interested in novels about novelists, or in artists generally,

⁹ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, Stephen Heath ed. and trans. (London, Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-143.

¹⁰ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. xi.

¹¹ Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, p.113.

¹² Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

¹³ Walpole, *The Green Mirror*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. vii. Subsequent references are to this edition.

unless their lives were sexually dramatic.¹⁴ Despite this, he would successfully produce novels about a social class that felt itself under siege, and novels about the strivings of writers, which says much for his understanding of the literary taste of his readers. There is the suspicion of a shared cultural conservatism with his audience, and Walpole's commercial success suggests that he was looked to by his readership to navigate and interpret social concerns and the cultural scene as well. Walpole's fiction not only interprets the social and cultural scene for his readers, but his omniscient presence as author frequently intervenes to clarify his text. Walpole here fulfils the role of the author as explainer, as identified, and subsequently challenged, by Roland Barthes.

The *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.¹⁵

The authorial distance or invisibility which is a feature of modernist texts, is not one of the techniques Walpole intends to combine with his traditional approach, in fact his authorial presence is one of the things which illustrates his interpretation of tradition. Walpole not only speaks through marginal characters such as the middlebrow author Amos Campbell in *The Young Enchanted* (1921), already encountered in Chapter One of this study, but he breaks the literary fourth wall as narrator to address the reader directly.

Walpole does not provide a fit with those radical contemporaries who receive the lion's share of academic attention, through the canon approach favoured by periodisation. The canon emerges through simple practicality, given the exigencies of the teaching of English literature via the period survey course, but necessitates some sort of value judgement.¹⁶ F. R. Leavis expresses this in *The Great Tradition* (1948), 'far from all of the names in the literary

¹⁴ Walpole, 'Preface', *Hans Frost*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. ix. Subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁵ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, p. 143.

¹⁶ See Underwood, chapters 3 and 4, pp. 81-135.

histories really belong to the realm of creative achievement'.¹⁷ The widening scope of the academic study of literature has drawn attention to many authors who have been previously overlooked, and Hugh Walpole has lately come into focus for his role as Chairman of the Book Society, as part of Nicola Wilson's project of ongoing research into the first British book sales club established in 1929.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Alexis Weedon has examined the influence upon Walpole of his exposure to Russian modernism during his time in that country in 1917.¹⁹ Both writers have concerned themselves with the battle of the brows; examining not only the 'highbrows' and 'middlebrows', but the 'broadbrow', a term utilised by H. G. Wells, J. B. Priestley, and Walpole himself, to suggest a widely-read, open-minded cultural consumer.²⁰

The Rising City

It is not always apparent where the literary modernity that Walpole sometimes refers to is located. Walpole credits Henry James with the revelation 'that it was possible for all the adventures of life worth recording to take place inside the human being rather than outside', discovering 'a new continent of psychology and emotion' in the process.²¹ Walpole sees this breakthrough occurring in the latter part of James's career, with *Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Although Walpole seems to praise James's achievement, in the face of what he sees as the criticism of those works, he also suggests that this 'new world of psychology' led to the dismissal of Thackeray, Dickens, Peacock, Austen, and Mrs Gaskell, and the Victorian novelists' 'atmosphere of jolliness' by

¹⁷ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London, Penguin/Peregrine, 1983), p. 10.

¹⁸ Nicola Wilson 'Virginia Woolf, Hugh Walpole, the Hogarth Press, and the Book Society', *ELH*, Vol. 79. no. 1, 2012, pp. 237-260, at *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/elh.2012.0008 [accessed 13/11/2019].

¹⁹ Alexis Weedon and Giannandrea Poesio, 'The Origins of the Broadbrow: Hugh Walpole and Russian Modernism in 1917', *Book History*, Vol. 22, 2019, p. 280-302, *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/bh.2019.0009 [accessed 13/11/2019].

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Walpole, *The English Novel*, pp. 26-27.

the 'newer men [who] will have none of them'.²² Walpole then sets out to combine the traditions established by this roll-call of spurned novelists, with the approach to psychology that Henry James has brought to the table. In practice, Walpole provides plot-driven stories, seasoned with a commentary upon his main characters' internal mental processes. Walpole's approach is 'to hold on to some of the good pre-War things and at the same time to be alive to all the new things as well'.²³ It is interesting that Charles Morgan sees Walpole's publisher Macmillan adapting to a new age post-war in similar terms, 'Having emancipated themselves from Victorianism where it was dangerous and carefully preserved the good in it'.²⁴

It seems fitting that the Cumberland Edition of Walpole's works should appear in 1934. Walpole was close to completing the sequence of novels he had designed to depict the England of the previous three decades, just as events in Europe were announcing a new chapter that would transform Britain and the whole world. In August of that year Adolf Hitler became Führer of Germany upon the death of President Hindenberg, combining the roles of Chancellor and Dictator as the new Head of State. The irony of Compton Mackenzie's observation that the young novelists starting out in the early 1900s had seen the Boer War as the defining crisis of their era, only for it to be outweighed by the Great War of 1914-18, was due to be compounded by a crueller irony still. The decades of conflict that form the backdrop to Hugh Walpole's career as a writer of modern romances once again merit comparison with the early decades of the nineteenth century, their wars, the consequent political and social disruption, and the cultural revolution that accompanied it.

Walpole claims in the Preface to the Cumberland Edition of *The Young Enchanted* (1921), that he only ever attempted to chart the immediate post-war period in *The Young Enchanted*

²² Walpole, *The English Novel*, pp. 26-27.

²³ Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, pp. ix-x.

²⁴ Morgan, *The House of Macmillan (1843-1943)*, p. 225.

and in *The Thirteen Travellers* (1920).²⁵ ‘Immediate’ must be the operative word here as he clearly intended to go on to chart social change in the years following the 1914-18 War. His actual ambition from early in his career was to emulate *La Comédie humaine* (1815-1848) of Balzac, but he claims he kept this quiet for fear of accusations of pretentiousness and over-ambition.²⁶ Walpole planned nine novels, three about London dubbed *The Rising City*, a London transformed not only by progress but by the ascent of youth, three about provincial life, and three set in the country, all of which were to be romantic in tone. The London novels are *The Duchess of Wrexe* (1914), *The Young Enchanted* and *Wintersmoon* (1928), the provincial novels are *The Cathedral* (1922), *Harmer John* (1926) and *The Inquisitor* (1935) (completed after the first appearance of *The Cumberland Edition*), and the three country novels ultimately became the four volumes in the Herries saga. In *The Rising City*, *The Duchess of Wrexe* would cover the Boer War years, and the Edwardian era, the second volume of the trilogy would cover Walpole’s own youthful experiences of 1908-12, and the third volume would celebrate ‘the beautiful and progressive civilisation’ Walpole assumed was around the corner.²⁷ Because of the changes wrought by the Great War, instead of charting the steady progress to an imagined utopia, *The Rising City* would come to document an age of uncertainty.²⁸

Walpole says that all the novels in his panorama of city, provincial, and country life are ‘social’ (his italics), and his ‘three representative families, the Beaminsters, the Trenchards and the Herries [...] distinguish racial, social, intellectual gradations and influences’.²⁹ The three families are intended to be symbolic of English society as a whole but they are hardly

²⁵ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. xi.

²⁶ Walpole, *Harmer John*, p. vii.

²⁷ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexe*, p. vii.

²⁸ Hugh Walpole mourning the ‘beautiful [...] civilisation’ cancelled by the onset of war, brings to mind Mark Fisher’s repurposing of Derrida’s concept of ‘hauntology’ to examine the ‘lost futures’ of modernity. See, Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, Zero Books, 2014).

²⁹ Walpole, Preface, p. viii.

the representatives that Walpole would claim. The Beaminsters are ambitious aristocrats, the Trenchards are complacently upper-middle class. The Herries clan, whose history spans a period from the eighteenth-century to the 1930s, does finally come to represent the wider social strata but even its poorest scions have aristocratic links. This is an ambitious project, anticipating Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time* (1951-1975), and one can understand Walpole's caution in revealing it, when he would come to be maligned as an over-reaching middlebrow in pieces by Middleton Murry (1921), and most recently in 1932 by Q. D. Leavis in *Fiction and the Reading Public*. What is clear from reading Walpole's Prefaces, to the Cumberland Editions and in the genre anthology *Four Fantastic Tales* (1932), is that he felt critics and the reading public had missed the point, not grasping the unifying themes behind his work, and failing to appreciate his use of symbolism.³⁰ If this was the case then surely the onus was upon Walpole to be more explicit in his intentions and to prove the value of his use of symbolism against charges of it being 'nonsense', as he himself concedes.³¹ What is also clear is that having condemned modern literary precociousness and self-regard, he ties himself up in knots insisting upon the 'jolly' 'human' simplicity of his work while attempting to draw attention to its serious purpose.³² The contradictions and inconsistencies in Walpole's Prefaces may betray a lack of intellectual rigour, or simply confirm the perils inherent in his navigation of received literary genres, and newly emerging literary styles, in his attempt to achieve a literature of transition between traditional prose fiction and modernism.

³⁰ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, pp. ix-x.

³¹ Walpole, 'Preface', *The Prelude to Adventure*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), pp. x-xi. Subsequent references are to this edition.

³² Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, pp. ix-x.

The Duchess of Wrexe, Her Decline and Death

The Duchess of Wrexe (1914), the first volume in his *Rising City*, has, Walpole suggests, become a 'period' novel by the 1930s, written as contemporary with his youth he finds it 'historical' by his middle-age.³³ The titular Duchess, once known through her important contacts as an influence on the fate of the nation, has become reclusive, but is rumoured to still wield influence from behind the scenes. Meanwhile, she exerts power within her own family, the Beaminsters. Walpole provides the reader with an intermediary, an itinerant alien outsider, Felix Brun, who interprets the Duchess as symbolic of her class and notes that with her passing 'There'll be other Principalities and Powers, but never *that* Power'.³⁴ Brun provides an exposition at the beginning of the book to Arkwright, an explorer lately returned to England having been conveniently lost in the African jungle for five years. Arkwright is no lion-shooting Allan Quatermain, Brun refers to him as a 'psychologist', so the latter's explanation of how English Society is divided into three parts takes on an anthropological interest. The Society Brun refers to is that represented by landed titled families, not society as a whole. The Aristocrats, unassertive and largely impoverished, stand aside from Society merely occupying the position their status has given them. The Democrats, a modern phenomenon, embrace representatives of contemporary culture, trading-off their own status in return for being kept amused. The Autocrats wield their influence to maintain the status quo, excluding anyone without the requisite ancestry.

As the full title of this novel reveals, it marks the passing of the Autocrats, as represented by the Duchess. Her remaining family, the Aristocratic Beaminsters, face the fate Brun has predicted for them: marginalisation and increasing economic hardship comparative to their former comfortable lifestyle. This transition is not engineered with any regard to changes in

³³ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexe*, p. vii.

³⁴ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexe*, p. 6.

society at large, subsidiary non-Beaminsters are depicted only in relation to their association with the family, rather the passing of the Autocrats is marked by conflict within the family itself. The Duchess pushes her hated half-Russian granddaughter Rachel into marriage with the louche Lord Roderick 'Roddy' Seddon, the Duchess resents the girl, the product of a marriage between her son and an actress which she failed to prevent. She knows the marriage between Rachel and Seddon will founder on Seddon's philandering and thus the girl will be punished for her father's defiance of his mother. Meanwhile Francis Breton, grandson of the Duchess and the product of the elopement of the Duchess's daughter with another unsuitable spouse, has returned to England vowing revenge on his hated grandparent for hounding his mother to her death. Rachel withdraws from Roddy as he continues to pursue other women, as predicted by the Duchess, however she meets Breton and forms an attachment to him. Roddy is then paralysed after a riding accident and Rachel discovers she is pregnant after an implied incidence of marital rape. Roddy, coming to terms with his disability, and after some soul-searching, engineers a meeting between Breton, Rachel and the Duchess. When Rachel determines to remain with her husband, and help nurse him while bringing up their child, the Duchess realises her power is broken and withdraws to die.

The suggestion that the Duchess's death marks the end of an era is emphasised by Walpole's juxtaposing of it with the reaction to the announcement of the relief of Mafeking in 1900. The raising of the siege marked an upturn in British fortunes in the progress of the Boer War, and may be seen as indicating a new optimism to coincide with the passing of the old order, but Walpole's treatment of the event is somewhat equivocal. Brun and the Duchess's physician Dr Christopher find themselves caught up in street celebrations which rapidly become chaotic and violent and where the options for the participant are 'Fear' or

‘Frenzy’, ‘the defiance that loss of individuality gives’.³⁵ The near-rioting throng is shown as being drawn from a class represented by ‘a miserable clerk on nothing a week’ who finds himself ‘for the first time in [his] existence [...] the ruthless master of a wretched, law-making tyrannous world’.³⁶ Jeff Wallace has suggested that ‘“The clerk” became a figure of macabre fascination for modernists of the Bloomsbury variety’, commonplace and yet ‘beguilingly strange’ with unknown motivation, and Walpole seems to be using this eponymous, and anonymous, figure of indeterminate class in much the same way.³⁷ The suggestion seems to be that waiting to fill the vacuum created by the departure of an omniscient autocracy is a resentful nihilistic mob.

Brun and Christopher’s subsequent discussion revolves around Brun quoting Shelley, having ‘fires out of the Grand Duke’s wood’, and prophesying a period of chaos followed by ‘a world, ruled by brain, by common sense, by understanding, not by sentiment and confusion’.³⁸ Brun expounds his theory of the Tiger, the hidden part of himself that a man must come to terms with in order to progress, or else build walls to contain and consequently live in constant fear of its escape. Brun’s ‘Tiger’ seems to anticipate Freud’s theory, from his personality model of 1923, concerning the existence of the Id, the instinctual part of the mind governing aggression and sexual drives.³⁹ Brun suggests that the Duchess and her class have conspired to keep these Tigers caged up in order to control people, and change will only come when they are unleashed. While Brun suspects that the immediate future will be ‘every man for his own hand’, the sentimental Christopher hopes for a Rising City based on self-

³⁵ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. 416.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jeff Wallace, ‘“The stern task of living”: *Dubliners*, Clerks, Money and Modernism’, in *Gothic Modernisms*, eds. Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001), p. 113.

³⁸ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, pp. 420-421. The line of Shelley is from ‘Letter to Maria Gisborne’ (1820).

³⁹ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere (London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1927).

denial and the Brotherhood of Man.⁴⁰ Both men are ultimately optimistic, but Brun believes that his version of a world under the rule of reason will only come about after the mob-rule they have recently experienced has both metaphorically, and literally, burned the Grand Duke's wood.

The novel seems Jamesian in intent, and in its examination of snobbery, and a class not so much in decline as being ushered out of the way by events, also harks back to the 'silver fork' novel. Walpole uses his favoured device of 'privileged' intruders, intruders with rights, disrupting the status quo, as introduced in his very first novel *The Wooden Horse* (1909). Where Harry Trojan was a conventional 'intruder hero' in the earlier book, Francis Breton and the outsider Rachel share the role here. Another kind of outsider, Brun, acts as dispassionate observer, his fascination with a world he is not a part of mirroring the experience of the reader. Although writing about the year 1900, Walpole completed the book between 1912 and 1914, and the worsening international situation must have had an impact on its forays into political philosophy. He writes in his preface that 1914 marked a break with the world of the previous year, and those writers who had begun their careers in one world 'had a hard task to move into the new one'.⁴¹ An ambivalence regarding the masses, first expressed in the depiction of the near-riot following Mafeking, would continue to surface throughout his writing career, particularly after his own experiences as a newspaper correspondent, and as a propagandist for the British Foreign Office, in Russia during the Revolution of 1917.

Speak for England

In a brief author's note to the original publication of *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, Walpole reassured 'nervous readers' that 'in an age of Trilogies and Sequels' this novel would stand

⁴⁰ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. 422.

⁴¹ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

alone, and only share connections with the following two novels in terms of place, idea, chronological sequence, and characters, and therefore the novels would not be sequels and neither would the project be a trilogy.⁴² A trilogy in all but name then, with Walpole cautious at being thought over-reaching. *Punch* wrote that Walpole was already ‘a force in modern fiction’ but suggested that the book would do little to extend his reputation as it was too gloomy, as were its characters who displayed ‘too much sensibility, of the modern kind’, and the novel itself containing ‘too many meanings’.⁴³ The reviewer of *The Observer* is eager at the prospect of the developing drama and glad that Walpole’s big theme is advanced without the necessity of demonstrating a theory or holding up a banner.⁴⁴ Harold Hannington Child in the *TLS* sees the drama of the narrative as less interesting than Walpole’s display of ‘social understanding’.⁴⁵

The original note to *The Duchess of Wrexhe* in 1914 mooted plans for the trilogy-in-all-but-name that was to be *The Rising City*, a plan later confirmed in the Preface to that novel’s 1934 Cumberland Edition. The Preface to *Harmer John* (1926 [1934])) in the same edition confirms that it was Walpole’s intention to produce the three ‘trilogies’ covering contemporary society, but that he had kept this ambition quiet, although it is obvious that the evidence of the original author’s note to *The Duchess of Wrexhe* suggests otherwise. The Preface to *The Young Enchanted* further obfuscates matters when Walpole provides an alternative sequence, *The Green Mirror* (1918), with its ‘kind of’ sequels, *The Young*

⁴² Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, *The Rising City: 1*, ‘Note’ (New York, George Doran, 1914), Project Gutenberg, at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/33086/33086-h/33086-h.htm> [accessed 13/01/2018].

⁴³ Owen Seaman, Ed., *Punch or The London Charivari*, ‘Our Booking-Office’, Vol. 146, Feb 18, 1914, Project Gutenberg eBook, at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22576/22576-h/22576-h.htm> [accessed 13/01/2018].

⁴⁴ ‘The Duchess of Wrexhe’, Feb 15, 1914, *The Observer* (1901-2003) (London, UK), at <http://libezproxy.open.ac.uk/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/docview/480796318?accountid=14697> [accessed 13/01/2018].

⁴⁵ Harold Hannington Child, ‘The Duchess of Wrexhe’, *Times Literary Supplement* (London, England), Thursday 5 Feb. 1914, page 63, issue 629, Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive. Web, at <http://find.galegroup.com/libezproxy.open.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=&docId=EX1200015415&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> [accessed 13/01/2018].

Enchanted (1921), and *Hans Frost* (1929), to ‘emphasise [...] the extraordinary transitional period in which we are living’.⁴⁶ When Macmillan published *The Duchess of Wrexhe* in a pocket edition in 1926, with reprints in 1929 and again in 1930, there is no author’s note about novel sequences or *The Rising City*. The flyleaf of the 1930 pocket edition instead provides an expanded list, ‘The London Novels’, being *Fortitude* (1913), *The Duchess of Wrexhe* (1914), *The Green Mirror* (1918), *The Captives* (1920), *The Young Enchanted* (1921), *Wintersmoon* (1928), and *Hans Frost* (1929), ‘Scenes from Provincial Life’ as *The Cathedral* (1922), *The Old Ladies* (1924), and *Harmer John* (1926), and ‘Scenes from Country Life’ as *Rogue Herries* (1930). Other titles to date are simply listed without designation, including the titles Walpole identified as ‘genre’.⁴⁷ A possible explanation is that all of Walpole’s non-genre books about English society after *The Duchess of Wrexhe* became an attempt to make sense of the ‘extraordinary transitional period’ in which he found himself living, and as his output expanded beyond his original sequences, subsequent novels attached themselves to the original planned ‘trilogies’.

Walpole engages in an elaborate performance as he constructs his image as a middlebrow author. The announcement of the *Rising City* project is followed by an apparent recantation. In his later prefaces he rewrites history to suggest that the *Rising City* and associated novels-sequence was kept secret, and modestly acknowledges that this was done to avoid appearing presumptuous. As Walpole became more outspoken about the dangers of modern writers taking themselves too seriously, he may have sought to downplay his original plan, but as he clearly did wish to be taken seriously, he could not totally distance himself from the grand design behind his survey of London, provincial, and country life in the 1920s and 1930s.

⁴⁶ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. xi.

⁴⁷ Flyleaf note: ‘Books by Hugh Walpole’, Hugh Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, ‘Pocket Edition’ (London, Macmillan, 1930).

Pre-echoes

If *The Duchess of Wrexhe* was the beginning of Walpole's conception of The Rising City trilogy, part of his plan to create a fictional world representing the first three decades of twentieth century England, then that trilogy was very soon to be subsumed into the broader panorama of 'The London Novels'. Setting aside the contrary nature of Walpole's memory of his intentions, it is this later 'London' designation that seems to have gained greater traction on publishers' flyleaves. A cast of recurring characters, some in minor and some in major roles, confirms the influence of Balzac, and there is some engagement with the changing face of the capital post-war, and the new generation that will inherit this new England whatever it proves to be. Not only does this expanded vision take in the novels going forward, it looks back to claim the novel *Fortitude* (1913), published immediately prior to *The Duchess of Wrexhe*.

Fortitude, is a *künstlerroman* about the struggles of aspiring novelist Peter Wescott. Wescott flees his native Glebeshire, Walpole's version of Cornwall, to escape his abusive father and his own fears that he will inherit the family traits of dissipation and sadism. After various hardships, he writes a critical best-seller, but fails to follow up on that initial success as he is overshadowed by the cult of literary novelty. Wescott marries, experiences the death of his first-born baby son, then loses his wife to someone he considered a friend. Finally, he returns to Glebeshire to confront his destiny, is saved by the courageous example of a dying female friend, and experiences a mystical epiphany, in which it is revealed to him that it is adversity that forms character.

After a slow start, but nudged by Arnold Bennett who, despite disliking the novel, urged George Doran his American publisher to take it on, *Fortitude* eventually achieved excellent sales, and apparently disseminated the homespun philosophy of its opening line: "'Tisn't life

that matters! 'Tis the Courage you bring to it'''.⁴⁸ It is *Fortitude* that Nick Adams and his friend Bill admire in the story 'The Three-day Blow' in Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925).

Fortitude is more backward-looking than modern. The tragic, and indeed telegraphed, death of Wescott's child seems a particularly 'Victorian' device, although it has its place in modernist fiction.⁴⁹ The observations on the literary scene are skewed to Walpole's own view, that at a time when virtually anyone is capable of producing a technically competent novel, publishers are drawn to novelty to distinguish their product from the herd.⁵⁰

Elizabeth Steele has identified the main creative sources for *Fortitude*, chief of which must be Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), and expands upon the whole concept of Walpole's influences noting the inevitable impact of his voracious reading habits.⁵¹ Steele also quotes Eliot's famous passage on creative borrowing from 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919).⁵² What were influences and echoes to Steele in 1972 is intertextuality to the modern critic, an important reference point when considering Walpole, if only in its purely allusive sense, rather than in Julia Kristeva's deconstruction of language and the cultural text.⁵³

If *Fortitude* bids farewell to the Victorian novel, then *The Duchess of Wrexe* which follows is not quite ushering in a new era, rather it is a prequel to the later London Novels. Within the conventionalities of the plot the social commentary comes from the debate between Felix Brun and Dr Christopher. Christopher is aware of the imminence of change but optimistic about the Rising City of the future. Brun, a citizen of the world, also sees change coming but expects it initially to be accompanied by conflict.

⁴⁸ Walpole, 'Preface', *Fortitude*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), pp. vii-ix. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Brunton, 'May Sinclair's Modernism and the Death of the Baby', in Anthony Patterson and Yoonjoung Choi, eds. *Maverick Voices and Modernity, 1890-1939* (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars, 2015), pp. 52-67.

⁵⁰ Walpole, *Reading*, p. 81.

⁵¹ Steele, pp. 51-54.

⁵² Steele, p. 53.

⁵³ Walpole and Intertextuality would make an interesting paper in itself given the author's flirtation with social commentary. This study is indebted to Graham Allen's primer for an understanding of the theory. Graham Allen, *Intertextuality* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2003).

King Mob

It is reasonable to assume that international tension during the writing of *The Duchess of Wrexhe* will have coloured some of the debate contained within the latter part of it. If, as he claims, Walpole was already anticipating a ‘beautiful and progressive civilisation to come’, when he embarked upon his Rising City trilogy, the philosophical argument between Brun and Christopher indicates that he acknowledged the possibility that such an outcome might only be achieved after a period of violence.⁵⁴ Brun and Christopher’s discussion, following in the wake of the near-riot they found themselves caught up in, obviously suggests that such a conflict-to-come will be class-based. It is tempting to see Walpole’s depiction of a frenzied ‘miserable clerk’ who finds himself a ‘ruthless master’ for a day as the demonisation of the working-class, an echo of the proletarian-Gothic that fed the worst nightmares of the middle-class readers of G. M. R. Reynolds’s penny dreadfuls.⁵⁵ In contrast, the wilful abandon of an ancient rite, where social conventions are upended, as represented by the Trellis Dance in Walpole’s genre books *Maradick at Forty* (1910) and *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925), tends to be a prelude to positive emotional empowerment, a manifestation of Bakhtin’s theory of ‘carnival’.⁵⁶ Elsewhere in his fiction, Walpole’s crowds riot as regularly, and as destructively, as the residents of Springfield in any given episode of the popular animated series *The Simpsons*.⁵⁷ A Chartist demonstration turns into a melee in *The Fortress* (1932), as do the protest marches in revolutionary Petrograd in *The Secret City* (1919); in the provincial novels *Harmer John* (1926), and *The Inquisitor* (1935), the marginalised residents of Seatown in Polchester can be rallied into a mob at a moment’s notice.

⁵⁴ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

⁵⁵ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. 416.

⁵⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Theory and History of Literature, Volume 8, ed. & trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 122-123.

⁵⁷ *The Simpsons* (Gracie Films/20th Century Fox Television, 1989-). See also: https://simpsons.fandom.com/wiki/Lists_of_Random_Fist_Fights_and_Riots_in_Springfield [accessed 12/01/2020].

Despite Walpole's evident unease with the masses, a discontented proletariat rarely coalesces into a major threat within his novels. The police eventually contain the rioters in *The Inquisitor*, and an army of volunteers break the General Strike in *Vanessa* (1933). Any disaffection is more a symptom of uncertain times, with the lower orders portrayed as unruly children reacting to an absence of adult discipline. The real threat in Walpole's novels is the threat posed to traditional values, either by opportunistic individual villains seeking self-advantage, or more seriously from those who seek to remake the world out of a misplaced sense of superiority. It is here that Walpole's view of a society undergoing a transformation synchronises with his view of new literary movements: modernism becoming a metaphor for unrestricted, and potentially destructive, change. It is tempting to see his conflation of this kind of ungoverned social revolution, with the revolution in literature, as some sort of ideological 'dog-whistle' to use the modern idiom. The social upheaval that Walpole sets out to chart has its cultural correlative and is expressed in matching language. Brun, representing the new mood from Europe, sees social change accompanied by violence, and the cultural change observed by Walpole and his coterie is represented in a similar idiom. The modernists driving change are the 'Destroyers', as Clemence Dane describes them, 'destroying in order to new make'.⁵⁸ Elizabeth Steele sees the publication of *Wintersmoon* (1928) as marking Walpole's ultimate disillusionment with modernism after an initial honeymoon period of enthusiasm, but arguably, despite his expressed desire to embrace the nuts and bolts of modern technique and psychological insight, he was sceptical of modernism from the outset.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Dane, p. 58.

⁵⁹ Steele, p. 105.

Rising London

Despite Walpole's claim to Swinnerton that his absorption in Art had been overshadowed by the War of 1914-18, nothing stemmed the flow of work. 1917 was the only year in his career, following the publication of *The Wooden Horse* in 1909, in which he didn't have a book published, although the previous year of 1916 had seen the publication of two books, the Russian novel *The Dark Forest* and his monograph *Joseph Conrad*. To put this in context, many subsequent years saw multiple publications, the most remarkable year being 1932, with an assortment of titles bearing his name. Self-publicity may have been cited as one of the reasons Walpole enjoyed such visibility with the book-buying and borrowing public, but it was backed up with solid industry.

Walpole finished *The Green Mirror*, his first for publishers Macmillan after leaving Martin Secker, in August 1914, revised it the following year, and it eventually saw publication in 1918. The novel fits into Walpole's sequence of London Novels, introducing the Trenchard family, cousins of the character John Trenchard who appears in *The Dark Forest*. Young Henry Trenchard, debuting here, later takes centre stage with his sister Millie in *The Young Enchanted* (1921), their elder sibling Katherine cameos in *The Captives* (1920), the intervening short story collection *The Thirteen Travellers* (1921) reintroduces Peter Wescott, from *Fortitude*, as Henry's friend who will later come to marry Millie. Walpole identifies *The Green Mirror* as a Family Novel, 'a *genre*' (his italics) he views as becoming very popular in England particularly with 'lady novelists', but one he believes never bettered since Trollope's Barchester series.⁶⁰ Walpole justifies this habit of drawing upon a recurring cast of characters by noting that it is a trait he shares with Trollope, and with Balzac, Thackeray, and George Meredith.⁶¹ Walpole may be charting modern times but his reference points are

⁶⁰ Walpole, *The Green Mirror*, pp. ix-x.

⁶¹ Ibid.

all in the past, and his most obvious embrace of intertextuality comes in referencing his own works. After *The Young Enchanted* there would be no London Novels until *Wintersmoon* (1928), an outright best-seller, which deliberately pitched traditional conservative values against the more radical notions of modernity.

In *The Green Mirror*, Philip Mark, the son of a family friend of the Trenchards, and lately returned to England from Russia, is the classic ‘intruder’ of Walpole’s fictions. The Trenchards’ extended family occupy a house in Rundle Square in Westminster, their stagnant world reflected in the drawing-room mirror, ‘the green walls, the green carpet, the old faded green place like moss covering dead ground’.⁶² Phillip and Katherine Trenchard fall in love, but although Phillip means to take Katherine away to live their own lives, he is no match for her mother, who will let nothing disrupt the stable routines of the family, even if it means accepting Phillip, who has lived outside of marriage with a woman in Russia, and his dubious moral history. Mrs Trenchard, more so than Morelli and the Duchess of Wrexhe, is the first of Walpole’s domestic tyrants, outwardly benign but controlling her family through a display of passive aggression. Ultimately Katherine takes charge, forcing Phillip to elope with her and creating a rift with her mother that is never healed. Katherine’s actions also liberate her siblings.

As an intruder, Phillip Mark represents a threat to the status quo, an overdue challenge to the English complacency personified by the Trenchard family. Such a challenge has already been articulated by the Trenchard family’s radical outsider: Uncle Tim. Although Uncle Tim’s vision of a ‘new city’ may turn out to be ‘as bad, as stupid, as selfish as the old one’, England can no longer ignore ‘other people, other ideas, other customs’; new classes are emerging independent of accidents of birth, and autocracy has become anachronistic.⁶³ Uncle

⁶² Walpole, *The Green Mirror*, p. 9.

⁶³ Walpole, *The Green Mirror*, p. 277.

Tim's rhetoric echoes the debate between Brun and Christopher from *The Duchess of Wrexhe* (1914). In the timeline of *The Rising City*, the Brun/Christopher debate took place three years earlier at the turn of the century, so little seems to have altered in this fictional world in the intervening period. It will take a World War to provide the real catalyst for change. Uncle Tim intervenes again later when, arguing with his sister Agnes, he has a moment of visionary optimism, which viewed over a hundred years later in the real world of England post-referendum, seems bitterly ironic:

The time will come [...] and I daresay it isn't so distant as you think, when you and your fellow-patriots, Aggie, will learn that England isn't all alone, on her fine moral pedestal, any longer. There won't be any pedestal, and you and your friends will have to wake up and realise that the world's pushed a bit closer together now-a-days, that you've got to use your eyes a bit, or you'll get jostled out of existence. The world's going to be for the young and the independent and the unprejudiced, not the old and the narrow-minded.⁶⁴

Unreal City

Youth, as represented by Henry and Millie Trenchard, has its own experience of love and adventure in *The Young Enchanted* (1921). The fictional timeline has now caught up with the actual period, and it is 1920 in a London reinventing itself after War. Millie has a love affair with an unsuitable young man who turns out to have got a girl into trouble and abandoned her, while Henry plays knight errant, rescuing a girl from a mother apparently bent upon selling her virginity, after which, conceding that the girl doesn't love him, he gives her up. Henry is consumed with a vision of England that has survived the War through the importance of family, Millie has her great doomed love affair and then, like Marianne in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), settles for the security of an older spouse, in this case Henry's friend Peter Wescott. Walpole is still concerned with generational conflict, the *Rising City* of post-war youth, but his younger characters are basically old-fashioned traditionalists fighting to preserve the values they grew up with.

⁶⁴ Walpole, *The Green Mirror*, p. 454.

Among Walpole's traditional values is the preservation of romance. Brun in *The Duchess of Wrex* believes that only by embracing romance can one understand the Duchess, and in *The Young Enchanted* a particularly intrusive authorial voice argues that one cannot catch his characters, or 'that strange, restless, broken, romantic, aspiring, adventurous, disappointing, encouraging, enthralling, Life-is-just-beginning-at-last Period [...] simply with the salt of sheer Realism'.⁶⁵ Thus, in searching for a means to capture the prevailing mood of the times, Walpole turns, not to the modern techniques he hoped to integrate within his traditional approach, but to the novel of romance.

In his 1924 autobiography *The Crystal Box*, Walpole would come to argue that the arts do not advance, and that in literature, as in the other arts, there is no progress but only a succession of interpreters. The following year, in his Rede lecture, published as *The English Novel* (1925), Walpole did concede to an evolutionary process. Highlighting the period 1870 to 1900, he selected three forces driving this change: a growing consciousness of technique, a new theory of morality, and the emergence of, for him, that much-despised Realism.

Walpole opines that the first two forces originated in France, where the work of Stendahl, Flaubert and de Maupassant had highlighted the clumsy inefficiency of the English novel of the Victorian period. For the growth of realism in the English novel Walpole selects a 'big six' to rival the Romantics in their influence, namely Henry James, George Moore, Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, and John Galsworthy. Walpole writes that these six were reacting against the hypocrisy they detected in society at large and the carelessness they observed around them in their chosen art. The tragedy for literature in Walpole's view is, that following this breakthrough, post-war disillusionment would infect the modern novel in the 1920s, to the extent that it became a catalogue of base and mean detail threatening 'every

⁶⁵ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. 25.

impulse of spontaneous sincerity'.⁶⁶ Walpole contends that the trend, or drive, towards realism in the novel had come to centre on the prevailing mood of the 1920s, which was one of disillusionment and uncertainty born out of the War, and what Chris Baldick describes as the damage done to British civilisation in terms of 'its collective morale, its self-belief, and cultural self-confidence'.⁶⁷ Uncertainty and a sense of disillusionment may define the cultural landscape of the 1920s, but Hugh Walpole in his preface to *The Cumberland Edition of The Thirteen Travellers* in 1934, remembers 1919-1924 as both 'the most fantastic' period of his life as well as a time when artists felt destabilised.⁶⁸ He writes that, in his work, he felt the need to hold on to the good things about the pre-war world while embracing the new, and that this gave him a reputation for uncritical enthusiasm when he really foresaw a danger of the novel becoming 'too precious and sanctified', when it had always been intended to be 'a jolly, human, lively thing'.⁶⁹

Other rooms, other voices

Reading contemporary accounts of the literary landscape in the 1920s emphasises that while modernism was certainly a force for change, the overthrow of the traditional novel was hardly a fait accompli. Walpole, somewhat earlier, and Virginia Woolf in 'How it Strikes a Contemporary' in 1925, had both indicated the absence of any dominating critical authority in the period. The dissatisfaction with the way the modern novel was headed however, emerges in Walpole's satirical description of a literary party in *The Young Enchanted* in 1923. Amos Campbell, one of Walpole's frequent fictional alter-egos, argues against the tendency to take literature too seriously. Campbell goes on to assert, as Virginia Woolf would later in 'Modern Fiction' (1921), that all literary judgements would be subject to the

⁶⁶ Walpole, *The English Novel*, pp. 20-29.

⁶⁷ Baldick, *Literature of the 1920s*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. ix.

⁶⁹ Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, pp. ix-x.

final judgement of history.⁷⁰ In Woolf's essay 'How it Strikes a Contemporary', she compares the certainties that both Walter Scott and Jane Austen shared with their readership, with the lack of certainty in the literary world of the 1920s: all Woolf's contemporaries can depend upon are their own 'senses and emotions'.⁷¹ Walpole remained unconvinced. In *The English Novel* (1925) Walpole identified a danger whereby the modern realist author, reacting to the disillusionment and destabilisation of the period, may have her characters function as avatars for aspects of modern life, or conduits for social commentary, rather than attempting to create recognisable human beings with whom the reader could identify.⁷² In a letter to Frank Swinnerton, where he describes writers Dorothy Richardson, Katherine Mansfield, and Wyndham Lewis as 'the Clever Ones', Walpole suggests that while these writers surpass Swinnerton and Walpole himself in 'Style' and 'Observation' 'their characters are like people seen for a moment in a Tube and no more, and their philosophy is merely transient emotion'.⁷³

It is reasonable to assume that Walpole felt he shared certainties with his readership, a belief in those traditional values that would help weather the uncertain times, that were in fact the only means to navigate through the uncertainty. 'Traditional values' is a vague term, not really made any clearer by Doctor Christopher's espousing of a philosophy of self-denial and the Brotherhood of Man in *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, but it is precisely that vagueness that gives it its potency, a catch-all phrase for which the audience provides its own personal definition. Where literary modernism asked questions, or challenged its readers to make up their own minds, Walpole's brand of modern romance offered its audience a kind of certainty.

⁷⁰ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. 209.

⁷¹ Virginia Woolf, 'How It Strikes a Contemporary' from *The Common Reader* (London, Hogarth Press, 1925), location: 21311 of 182519.

⁷² Walpole, *The English Novel*, p. 32.

⁷³ Swinnerton, p. 46.

The Thirteen Travellers

Looking back on his post-Great War work from the arguably no less stable situation of 1934, Walpole wished that more novelists had attempted to document the period, suggesting that contrary to popular opinion people probably do ‘read novels for their pictures of past social conditions’.⁷⁴ After the ‘period’ novel that he suggested *The Duchess of Wrexhe* had become by the time of its publication, Walpole was largely engaged with writing books examining his era in real time, setting characters sharing those mysterious ‘traditional values’, against both unprincipled opportunists, and principled people with ‘modern’ ideas that were potentially disturbing to Walpole’s core audience. Douglas Goldring in *Reputations* (1920) suggested that Walpole’s audience was drawn from those who shared his ‘liking for duchesses’, even going so far as to say that the people who were most interested in titles were those with titles themselves.⁷⁵ It is unlikely that Walpole would have garnered the huge audience he did if he had depended upon the aristocracy for his readership. Clemence Dane, in *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* (1930), with her conjuring of the ‘traditive’ novel, claimed his typical reader demanded that blend of romance, manners, and realism which, prior to Hugh Walpole’s apotheosis, had not successfully conjoined in the work of any single author.⁷⁶ That new ideas were the order of the day was not an issue, the question was how such things might best be communicated. Hugh Walpole, ‘the most traditive of the middle-period moderns’, was providing a palatable form of innovation where the general reader had been frightened by *Ulysses* (1922), baffled by *Jacob’s Room* (1922), and alienated by Gertrude Stein.⁷⁷ Dane was adamant that what Walpole was attempting was experimental writing within an acknowledgement of tradition, and that his particular innovation found favour, when general

⁷⁴ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. xi.

⁷⁵ Douglas Goldring, ‘Three Georgian Novelists: II. Hugh Walpole’, in *Reputations* (London, Chapman and Hall, 1920), pp. 52-53.

⁷⁶ Dane, p. 13-14.

⁷⁷ Dane, p. 78.

readers had almost despaired of finding new writers who could ‘write about new ideas in an old-fashioned way’.⁷⁸ Writing about new ideas in an old-fashioned way is still writing in an old-fashioned way, so it is difficult to see where the claims for this being experimental writing come in.

In the summer of 1919 Walpole had to interrupt *The Cathedral* (1922), the first of his ‘provincial’ novels accompanying the London novels of the Rising City sequence, to fulfil a commission from publishers Hutchinson for a volume of short stories, its theme being, as described by Rupert Hart-Davis, ‘the effect of the war on the leisured classes and the “new poor”’.⁷⁹ Although Walpole regularly submitted short stories to periodicals, and published six collections including the posthumous *Mr Huffam* (1948), he was not particularly comfortable in a medium which was to become synonymous with modernist technical innovation. Arguably, unlike the novel format, he found the effort disproportionate to the rewards, both artistically and commercially. The commissioned book, *The Thirteen Travellers*, appeared in 1921, and according to Hart-Davis, Walpole had a low opinion of it blaming “‘yielding to Mammon””, which he vowed never to do again, although arguably he did, with the magazine commission for what became *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925).⁸⁰

The Thirteen Travellers is the most obvious attempt by Walpole to provide a snapshot of post-war English life, ‘obvious’ being the operative word, as in some of the stories one feels he has shoehorned his characters into situations in order to fulfil a brief. That brief in itself seems extraordinary now, ‘the effect of the war on the leisured classes and the “new poor”’, confirms that Walpole has become a sort of literary conduit for the trials and tribulations of the aristocracy and the upper echelons of the middle-class, and that this subject is seen as

⁷⁸ Dane, p. 79.

⁷⁹ Hart-Davis, p. 187.

⁸⁰ Hart-Davis, p. 208.

having commercial appeal. This assessment is validated when considering Walpole's declaration on considering his plan for the late novel *The Joyful Delaneys* (1938), 'the English aristocracy in their new poverty. *Exactly* the subject for me'.⁸¹

The stories of *The Thirteen Travellers* are all set in the fictional Horton Buildings in London's Duke Street, and concern how various residents respond to the new social and economic climate. Walpole does deviate from his usual class obsession by drawing his cast of characters from a slightly wider pool. 'Absalom Jay', former man about town, sees his investments decline and dies in poverty and distress. 'Fanny Close' who has made herself indispensable at Hortons as portress, feels she must step aside to make work for freshly demobilised men, but then accepts an offer of marriage from the valet Albert Edward, a role no one can take away from her. 'The Hon. Clive Torby' has lost an arm in France in 1917, then loses his inheritance but finds work as a house-painter. 'Peter Wescott' is invited to contribute to a new critical review but finds himself out of step with the young moderns he meets at a literary tea-party. 'Mrs Porter and Miss Allen', is a macabre in the tradition of *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), in which Mrs Porter's late husband's consciousness survives death to continue tormenting his widow, and ultimately manifests himself to her companion Miss Allen, resulting in the demise of Mrs Porter. In 'Nobody' Claribel's rich Cousin Tom comes back from France a barely-functioning shell. His relatives circle, but Tom by a chance encounter discovers the life of the streets. Despising the lower orders' nascent bolshevism and resented in his turn, he nevertheless finds more of life there than with his own class.

In some of these stories, not all of which are summarised here, Walpole ignores his brief, as the characters, and the situations they find themselves in, are not unique to the immediate post-war period. Alongside Walpole's own dissatisfaction with the work, the review in the *TLS* at the time found the style 'nerveless', the stories 'curiously lacking in point and sense of

⁸¹ Walpole quoted in Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 373.

effect' and at the most generating 'a kind of null and flaccid benevolence'.⁸² Given that the theme of the collection corresponded with the theme of his *Rising City* and *London Novels* project, one must assume that its critical and personal failure was down to Walpole's uncertainty in the short-story medium, rather than any sense of having a subject foisted upon him. The book also drew the attention of John Middleton Murry writing in *The Nation and Athenaeum*, as the basis of a critical analysis of Walpole's particular appeal entitled 'The Case of Hugh Walpole' (1921).

The case of Hugh Walpole

Murry perhaps took exception to the portrayal of the modernist tea-party in the story 'Peter Wescott'. Wescott, Walpole's talismanic alter-ego, while enjoying the hospitality of the rich, conflicted, praise-seeking writer Edmund Robsart, a more mocking Walpole self-portrait, is invited by the critic Murdoch Temple to join the new paper *The Blue Moon*. Wescott attends a meeting of contributors and finds Temple's circle arrogant and self-applauding in their plans for a new post-war world.⁸³ Murry, in his piece, quotes the publishers blurb from *The Thirteen Travellers* describing Walpole's position in the front rank of modern authors as he 'views modern times in a modern spirit'.⁸⁴ Comparing Walpole to the popular novelists Ethel M. Dell and Hall Caine, Murry nevertheless suggests that his readers belong to 'a slightly superior social order', anticipating Walpole's own identification of the cultured Man in the Street, and signalling the often class-based identification of the middle-class middlebrow reader.⁸⁵ The comparison with Ethel M. Dell and Hall Caine is an interesting one, as here are

⁸²"List of New Books and Reprints", 'The Thirteen Travellers by Hugh Walpole' *Times Literary Supplement*, (London, England), 7 July 1921: 438+ Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive, Web. 29 July 2017, at <http://find.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupN=ame=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=&docId=EX1200199299&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> [accessed 19/03/2020].

⁸³ Walpole, 'Peter Wescott', in *The Thirteen Travellers*, pp. 75-96.

⁸⁴ Murry, p. 584.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

two other very successful writers of the period who are now all but forgotten. Dell (1881-1939) wrote romantic fiction of the kind we now associate with a modern usage of the term, the current province of publishers such as Mills & Boon.⁸⁶ Hall Caine (1853-1931), one of the most commercially successful writers of his day, was a novelist, playwright, poet and critic, who often courted controversy in work dealing with social problems and modern morality.⁸⁷

Walpole, in Murry's opinion, encourages his readership in seeing themselves as being serious and intellectual by confronting them with problems of the day, while simultaneously offering them reassurance. Here is Walpole presented as the novelist-as-guide or great-explainer. For Murry, the treatment of the post-war world in *The Thirteen Travellers* is simplistic, its concerns with Labour, Bolshevism, diminished fortunes, and changed returned veterans, are culled from 'the ladies page of any newspaper' and the changing social order is presented as 'dukes turned organ-grinders'.⁸⁸ The article goes on to say that while 1919 and 1920 have been depressing Walpole is far too much of an optimist to confront that fact, as he has no wish to dismay his readers but to reassure them. Walpole is vague because it is easier to promise his readers 'a newer and better world' than to ask them to think about what that may entail.⁸⁹ Arguably, Murry's complaint is that Walpole is giving the public what he, Walpole, thinks they want, instead of what he, Murry, knows they need. The thrust of Murry's criticism is that Walpole's presentation of the immediate post-war world trivialises both the political and artistic concerns of the day. Furthermore, in trying to present himself as modern, by setting his stories in contemporary London, Walpole has failed to acknowledge

⁸⁶ See David Tanner, 'Literary Success and Popular Romantic Fiction: Ethel M. Dell, a Case Study', in *The Book World: Selling and Distributing British Literature, 1900-1940*, Nicola Louise Wilson ed. (Leiden, Brill, 2016), pp. 83-94.

⁸⁷ See David Wilson, 'A Brief Biography of Hall Caine (1853-1931)', *The Victorian Web: Literature, history, and culture in the age of Victoria*, at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/caine/bio1.html> [accessed 21/11/2019].

⁸⁸ Murry, p. 584.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

his debt to tradition; Walpole would claim he was attempting to combine the two approaches. Murry claims Walpole's invention and imagination do not qualify as 'romance', and that his realism is 'soigne'.⁹⁰ Murry's own embrace of romanticism recalled that of the Romantic movement, an individual relationship with higher powers leading to some form of spiritual illumination.⁹¹ Walpole too would express a belief in other worlds, and the importance of spiritual growth, which suggests a greater parity in their views than Murry would acknowledge.

Murry's critique is as much an attack upon Walpole's literary output and status as it is upon his interpretation of post-war politics and society. Middlebrow literature is censured for not being serious enough, for taking serious subjects: social or ethical dilemmas, questions of morality, emotional relationships, and psychological analysis, and repackaging these in an easily-digested form for a mass audience. This is the contention expressed in Q. D. Leavis's *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932). Leavis undermines her argument by the extreme subjectivity of her literary opinions, as noted by Erica Brown, a subjectivity which assumes a fixed canon taking no account of the judgement of time.⁹² Pierre Bourdieu points out that these cultural distinctions only exist through each other, as culture does not have any intrinsic value then arguably it is all subjective, except perhaps as an indicator of class differentiation.⁹³ Bourdieu also indicates the capriciousness of cultural judgements, something alien to Leavis. What is debased today may have previously been considered

⁹⁰ Murry, pp. 584-585.

⁹¹ See, John Middleton Murry, *Defending Romanticism; Selected Essays of John Middleton Murry*, Malcolm Woodfield, ed. (Bedminster: The Bristol Press, 1991).

⁹² Erica Brown, 'Investigating the Middlebrow: Introduction', *Working Papers on the web*, Volume 11, July 2008, at <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/wpw/middlebrow/Brown.html> [accessed 14/01/2020].

⁹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 250-251.

refined, and may be critically elevated again; middlebrow culture is only devalued because it represents middle-class taste.⁹⁴

Modernist fiction is the point at which the text is offered without explanation, when the reader must decide upon meaning herself, where ‘text’ ceases to be the contents of a book and morphs into a theory.⁹⁵ This is the plot-less book where nothing happens, the antithesis of Hugh Walpole’s plot-driven narrative with its embedded guiding authorial voice. Jonathan Rose suggests that the common reader’s apparent alienation when confronted by modernism, was the deliberately engineered result of an intellectual elite striving to maintain their status in the face of a narrowing cultural gap, through the creation of a ‘difficult’ and obscure literary form.⁹⁶ While Walpole didn’t go so far as to suggest modernism was a form of cultural apartheid, he identified the years 1920 and 1921 as the period when the condemnation of the popular, the emergence of ‘priggish, snobbish, exotic exclusiveness’, and an ‘esoteric preciousness and abnormal ‘apartness’’, crept in as a reaction to the ‘vulgarity and coarseness’ of War.⁹⁷

The right pessimistic outlook

Middleton Murry is critical of Walpole’s adoption of a role in which he offers reassurance to his readers with a panacea based upon a misguided optimism. It is likely that Murry took exception to the caricature of himself in the story ‘Peter Wescott’, and to the satirical portrayal of modernist get-togethers. That said, the antidote Walpole offers to post-war disillusionment proves as diffuse as the work of Hacket Somers, the fictional poet whose latest work Wescott reads three times but still finds incomprehensible.

⁹⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 327-328.

⁹⁵ See, Allen, *Intertextuality*, pp. 67-68.

⁹⁶ Jonathan Rose, ‘A Conservative Canon: Cultural Lag in British Working-Class Reading Habits’, *Libraries & Culture*, vol. 33, no. 1, 1998, pp. 98–104, *JSTOR*, at www.jstor.org/stable/25548603 [accessed 29/01/2019]. Rose credits his conclusions with those of John Carey in *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992).

⁹⁷ Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. x.

In 'Peter Wescott' Walpole describes his writer-hero as a freshly-demobilised misanthrope, filled with self-loathing. He meets Fred Lester, the novelist husband of Milly Lester from *Maradick at Forty*, who invites him to dinner, where another guest is the vain Edmund Robsart, the most successful novelist of the day. Walpole points out in his Preface that he caricatured himself in 'Peter Wescott', and not in a pleasant way. Robsart in his turn invites Wescott to lunch in his rooms at Horton's, as he is seeking reassurance that he is still valid when a younger generation are taking over. It seems likely that Murry recognised the Robsart portrait as alluding to Walpole's own situation, given that he wrote in his review that Walpole suffered doubt when he compared his books with 'the real ones', but reassured himself with his own success, which is what Robsart does.⁹⁸ Robsart declares that he has been looking forward to the end of the War to revive his career, taking on the modernists at their own game, by showing that 'modernity was nothing but a new trick or two for covering up the same old thing. [...] Write in suspensive dots and dashes, mention all the parts of the body in full, count every tick of the clock, and call your book 'Disintegration'. Or 'Dead Moons', or 'Green Queens'.'⁹⁹ Accepting that Robsart is a caricature this is still a damning critique of new writing as nothing more than a superficial technique, and the criticism escalates from there. Robsart offers Wescott use of his flat while he is away and the younger man is subsequently visited by Murdoch Temple, an unflattering portrait of Middleton Murry. Temple, a name to conjure ivory towers, has failed to live up to early promise, editing two literary papers 'strangled at birth by an unsympathetic public', and producing a book of criticism, a novel, and a poem, under 'An unhappy chill'.¹⁰⁰ Despite an obvious love for literature 'everything in it must be new, and strange, and unsuccessful', success being the most terrible thing of all; Temple flatters Wescott and invites him to join a new paper, the

⁹⁸ Murry, p. 584.

⁹⁹ Walpole, 'Peter Wescott', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ Walpole, 'Peter Wescott', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 84.

Blue Moon, because he doesn't suffer from 'ghastly high spirits' and has 'the right pessimistic outlook'.¹⁰¹

Wescott attends for tea at a shabby room off Chancery Lane where some half-dozen scruffy men and a couple of women make him feel uncomfortable. He reads an undecipherable poem destined for the new periodical, and feeling himself marginalised, becomes increasingly angry as the company speak out against the popular, condemn patriotism, and pour scorn on everything else with a self-applauding arrogance. Leaving, he is plunged into a mood of deep pessimism, at his own failure, and at the failure of the 'new world' that he had hoped would be created 'by the forces of art, of brotherhood, of kindness, and charity, and nobility'.¹⁰² In Piccadilly Circus he experiences a curious epiphany, seeing the people of the city, and the human race at large, as existing in some sort of giant nursery, still children, playing games and sharing childish quarrels, but worthy of protection. While the story confronts the condemnation of the popular, and the pessimistic attitudes and exclusiveness emerging as a reaction to the War, which Walpole identifies in his 1934 Preface, the antidote to what might be termed the new pessimism is this bafflingly vague 'vision'. It is uncertain whether this symbolic nursery filled with children indicates that some sort of spiritual reset button has been pressed, with human society offered a fresh start post-war, and Walpole appears equally unsure, 'Would one wake in the morning and find that one was leaving the nursery for school? Who could tell? No one returned with any story....'.¹⁰³

In 'Nobody' Walpole offers a story framed through the perceptions of a teenage child, Claribel, who like Maisie Farange in Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897) uses her neglect by her adult relations as a space in which to observe them. What she realises is that

¹⁰¹ Walpole, 'Peter Wescott', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 84.

¹⁰² Walpole, 'Peter Wescott', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 92.

¹⁰³ Walpole, 'Peter Wescott', *The Thirteen Travellers*, pp. 95-96.

her rich cousin Tom, whom her greedy relatives leach on, has returned from the War an empty shell.

There was Nobody there, and then, as she began to reflect, there never had been anybody since the Armistice. Tom had never returned from France; only a framework with clothes hung upon it, a doll, an automaton, did Tom's work and fulfilled his place. Tom's soul had remained in France.¹⁰⁴

After the introductory observations from the point of view of Claribel, Tom's story takes centre-stage. He ventures out into the night to clear his head, and encounters a derelict old couple who rebuff his offers of help to get them home and out of the cold. Overcoming their ungrateful intransigence, he orders a cab and manages to return them to their filthy lodgings. The old man is rude and aggressive, the woman fawning, and Tom dislikes both of them intensely, but finding himself curiously animated by the experience, leaves them money and promises to return. Over the following weeks he meets their friends, and immerses himself in their world, and despite facing a catalogue of resentment and insults, and aware of his own distaste for them, he explains, 'I'm doing it because I'm interested, and I haven't been interested in anything for months'.¹⁰⁵ Alarmed by his mysterious excursions, Tom's family finally discover his secret, and believing him to have found religion, or to have embraced good works, attempt to talk him out of it, as they believe he is being exploited. He tries to explain his dispassionate motivation but fails.

I don't want to pick and choose according to class any more. I don't want to be anything ever again with a name to it – like a Patriot, or a Democrat, or a Bolshevik, or an anti-Bolshevik, or a Capitalist. I'm going by Individuals wherever they are.¹⁰⁶

Only Claribel seems to understand him, and she points out that despite the family apparently giving up on him they will always return for his money. As for Tom, 'The whole world seemed to be at his feet, and he no longer wished to judge it, to improve it, to dictate to it, to dogmatise it, to expect great things of it, to be disappointed in it....' Previously he wished to

¹⁰⁴ Walpole, 'Nobody', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁵ Walpole, 'Nobody', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 235.

¹⁰⁶ Walpole, 'Nobody', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 244.

improve people, but didn't love them, now he knows humanity can never be improved but he loves all of it.¹⁰⁷ The examples of humanity Tom claims affection for, while conceding that he doesn't actually like them very much, are thoroughly unpleasant, threatening him with the coming overthrow of his class while enjoying his largesse. Clearly, there is little difference between his grasping relatives who take him for granted, and the great unwashed who hate him and consider him an easy touch. The thrust of Walpole's text seems to be to accept life and enjoy it while looking out for those less fortunate than oneself. Middleton Murry can only respond with frustration at what the reviewer for the *TLS* described as this null and flaccid benevolence. Despite Walpole's contention in his preface that the stories in *The Thirteen Travellers* present 'bewildered and confused' persons, against an 'authentic' background, his heart hardly seems to be in the exercise, and his attempts to impose sense and order on 'a bewildering and confusing period' set up a dissonance within his material.¹⁰⁸

The enemy in ambush

Walpole's analysis of a changing society seems unfocussed, with a marginalised aristocracy, and a hard-up middle-class, both agonising, while the masses flirt with bolshevism, and his heroes experience moments of rapture. Walpole was surer of himself as regards changes in his own field of literature. In fact, rather than creating a literature to reflect the life of England in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, as he claimed was his ambition, he often creates a fiction to represent literary life in England for the same period.

In *The Young Enchanted* (1921), Peter Wescott cameos as the friend of Henry Trenchard who made his debut in *The Green Mirror* (1918). Henry orbits the margins of bohemian modernist society, visiting his artistic friends the Hunters, where he sees the Three Graces.

¹⁰⁷ Walpole, 'Nobody', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 245.

¹⁰⁸ Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. xi.

Whether it were because of the exhaustion that five years' war had entailed upon the men of the country or simply that the complete emancipation of women during the last decade had brought many new positions within women's power, it was certain that just at this period, that is at the beginning of 1920, much of the contemporary judgement on art and letters was delivered by women – and in letters by three women especially, Miss Talbot, Miss Jane Ross, and Miss Martha Proctor. These three ladies had certain attributes in common – a healthy and invigorating contempt for the abilities of the opposite sex, a sure and certain confidence in their own powers, and a love of novelty and originality.¹⁰⁹

Elizabeth Steele thinks the Three Graces are intended to represent Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, and Rebecca West.¹¹⁰ The portraits are far from flattering, and suggestive rather than specific. Talbot, while the most feminine and with a fine love of literature, destroys in print those novels that fail to live up to her idealised vision of the art. Plain Jane Ross, while the cleverest journalist alive in England, finds everything too easy, harbours grievances, and while brilliant is of diminishing influence. Proctor, less brilliant but more cultured than the other two, has had her day, modern realism has surpassed her expectations, and having been left behind by fashion she has become grudgingly pragmatic.¹¹¹ Neither the physical descriptions of the Graces, nor their biographical details, exactly identify them with their supposed originals. Walpole had by that time crossed swords with Rebecca West over her review of his Russian novel *The Dark Forest* (1916), he unwisely accused her of animus and came off worse in the subsequent correspondence.¹¹² He initially jousting with Mansfield over her review of *The Captives* (1920) but then had apparently been reconciled.¹¹³ Woolf he was to engage with in 1928 when he was chosen to present her with the *Femina - Vie Heureuse* Prize, after a poor start she asked him to dinner, and friendship ensued. If accepting that Jane Ross of *The Young Enchanted* might be Woolf, then Walpole's altered

¹⁰⁹ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p 40.

¹¹⁰ Steele, p. 100. Steele, accurately describing the portraits as 'acid', misremembers the text and consequently mixes up her Classical references, referring to the women as 'The Three Furies', although arguably this is within the spirit of their original presentation.

¹¹¹ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, pp. 40-43.

¹¹² Hart-Davis, pp. 172-3.

¹¹³ Hart-Davis, pp. 200-202.

attitude, following their friendship, may be discerned in the portrait of Jane Rose, name subtly changed, in *Hans Frost* (1929).

She looked like the wife of a Pre-Raphaelite painter, her dark hair brushed back in waves from her forehead, her grey dress cut in simple fashion, her thin pale face quiet and remote. She was, Hans thought, the best living novelist in England. She wrote the most beautiful prose in the most beautiful way. Her three novels, *The Haycock*, *Garlands Passage*, and *The Cattle Boat* were lovely, wonderful things. [...] her triumphant evocation of the drama of little things, her seemingly casual assembling of tiny significances that were the waving flags and beating drums of life's procession.¹¹⁴

The 'triumphant evocation of the drama of little things,' and 'seemingly casual assembling of tiny significances', as admired by the writer Hans Frost, offers a different reading of the technique of those modern writers despised by Edmund Robsart who, 'count every tick of the clock'.¹¹⁵

Henry's interlude at the Hunters' party serves as an introduction to the literary confrontation to come, the argument between the middlebrow author Amos Campbell and Monteith, a critic and editor in the Middleton Murry mould, taking him to task for separating Art from Life, and promoting a narrow field of work judged on the basis of an 'over-sophisticated, over-read, over-intellectual standard', while dismissing the rest.¹¹⁶ Having realised he will never be one of the Greats, Campbell would rather write for himself and be happy. Crucially, he thinks Talbot and Monteith are only second-rate as well, making up for a lack of talent by taking themselves too seriously and displaying an arrogant attitude. Campbell compares Talbot's short stories unfavourably to Tchekov and Maupassant, and likewise Monteith's poetry to T. E. Brown and Arthur Hugh Clough, neither of whom he rates anyway.¹¹⁷

Walpole clearly felt there was sufficient room for the popular to exist alongside the 'serious', although he despaired of the pessimism he claimed was infecting the modern novel post-war.

¹¹⁴ Walpole, *Hans Frost*, pp. 68-69.

¹¹⁵ Walpole, 'Peter Wescott', *The Thirteen Travellers*, p. 80.

¹¹⁶ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. 207.

¹¹⁷ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. 210.

Campbell condemns Monteith's judgemental approach to literature, but Walpole was not above making value judgements himself. In his essay on the novel in England, in *Tendencies of the Modern Novel* (1934), Walpole claimed that puzzlement over books like *Women in Love* (1920) and *Antic Hay* (1923) drove the public to the works of Gilbert Frankau and Warwick Deeping, when they should have been reading Francis Brett Young and J. B. Priestley, and presumably himself.¹¹⁸

With *Wintersmoon* (1928) Walpole brought the original *Rising City* to an end, although the *London Novels* would continue. Elizabeth Steele sees the work marking the lowest point in Walpole's belief in the concept behind the work, namely that youth would use their independence of the past as a force for good. Steele lays Walpole's disillusionment at the feet of those post-war writers 'whose effect on contemporary morals he feared (or thought he did)', and the implication that rising independence 'implied the overthrow of moral restraint', and the alarming 'iconoclasm and immorality' in the work of writers such as Huxley, Joyce, Lawrence, West and Richardson, with their philosophy of "Selfish hedonism".¹¹⁹

This all seems a little overwrought on Steele's part, and makes Walpole out to be both priggish and hypocritical, given that writer's endorsements in print of at least some of the writers on that list. While acknowledging the realistic modern novel as being better observed and showing a subtler technique than its forbears, Walpole condemns it for its lack of conviction, and for using characters as vehicles 'for some momentary comment on life rather than as living human beings into whose lives and joys and sorrows we are compelled to enter'.¹²⁰ However, Walpole recognises that there are younger writers combining new techniques with 'beauty and conviction', such as E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, and Virginia Woolf; other modern writers who favour a traditional approach to the same end, like Frank

¹¹⁸ Walpole, 'England', in *Tendencies of the Modern Novel* (Freeport, Books for Libraries Press, 1967), p. 19.

¹¹⁹ Steele, p. 105.

¹²⁰ Walpole, *The English Novel*, p. 32.

Swinnerton, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and Francis Brett Young, and presumably himself; and an upcoming generation also concerned with these qualities, including Aldous Huxley, David Garnett, Romer Wilson and Margaret Kennedy. That was Walpole's published view in 1925, had he within the next three years decided that Lawrence and Huxley were out to pervert public morals by their advocacy of consequence-free hedonism? Did he even believe that literature was capable of wielding that sort of influence?

In one of his frequent observations on changes to the novel since 1870, and its transformation under Russian and French influence into a 'serious business', Walpole notes the novel's prior purpose of providing entertainment, and as a form of moral instruction, and its replacement by something written about as if it were 'a form of higher mathematics' on the one hand and despised for its readability on the other.¹²¹ While his own work was at least partly concerned with the reality of evil, Walpole seems less concerned with other writers' lack of moral direction than with their celebration of impermanency, what he termed their 'philosophy of transient emotion'.¹²² Steele has suggested that Walpole was reacting to a selfish hedonism, presumably embraced by some sections of society as a correlative to post-war disillusionment. Walpole seems more exercised by modern pessimism *per se*. There is the sort of pessimism that triggered the Jazz Age version of dancing on the edge of the volcano, now passed down through popular culture, and there is a prophetic pessimism as articulated in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Walpole, as Middleton Murry noted, believed the antidote to pessimism lay in being optimistic, trite as that sounds. When the modern world offered only disillusionment and instability, Walpole through his favoured characters looked to the certainties of the past.

¹²¹ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. ix.

¹²² Swinnerton, p. 46.

Judgement at *Wintersmoon*

Wintersmoon (1928) begins at a party, with three pages of dialogue between Janet Grandison and an unnamed man, later identified as Wildherne Poole heir to the estate in the title, who is pressing her to marry him. Poole needs a son to reassure his father that the family name will continue, impoverished Janet cares only that she can provide for her younger sister Rosalind's education. The marriage eventually contracted is a business arrangement founded upon a platonic compatibility rather than love, a pragmatically modern solution perhaps but a soulless one. Wildherne confesses to Janet that he has a mistress whom he loves but is unable to marry, and who does not reciprocate his feelings. Janet loves only her sister. Walpole effectively conveys all this information through dialogue, in the aforesaid three pages, but any anticipation that this marks a new direct approach from the writer founders, as spare prose gives way to authorial exposition.¹²³

Walpole's detached observer Felix Brun is also at the party, recalling his predictions of twenty years previously. While he has been abroad he has read in the English newspapers, and in modern novels, that 'the Middle Classes [are] hopelessly and aimlessly impoverished, the Lower Classes rebellious, revolutionary, idle, and dole-fed', although he has since found 'none of the dazzling wickedness and abnormality' that these same novels have prepared him for, and that the Unemployed have 'struck him with their exceeding rosiness and physical vigour'.¹²⁴ It is worth noting that Walpole wrote *Wintersmoon* between 1924-1926, completing it two months before the start of the General Strike, and the declaration of Martial Law by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. Regarding the fate of Autocrats, Democrats and Aristocrats, those classes identified by Brun in *The Duchess of Wrexe* (1914): the Autocrats have either disappeared or been absorbed into the Democrat ranks, where they are popularly

¹²³ One wonders if Walpole, always open to influence, chose to begin *Wintersmoon* (1928) with three pages of dialogue after reading Ivy Compton-Burnett's own dialogue-heavy *Pastors and Masters* (1925).

¹²⁴ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), pp. 7-8. Subsequent references are to this edition.

believed to spend their time ‘drinking cocktails and dancing eternally to the jazziest of music’ providing ‘food for the novelist who wanted dazzling pictures with post-impressionist colours and Freudian titles’.¹²⁵ It is the Aristocrats that interest Brun, and Walpole, and given the ultimate success of *Wintersmoon*, his readers proved to be interested too.

Janet marries Wildherne, becoming Marchioness of Poole in the process, but Rosalind shows little interest in having anything to do with that world or with anyone over sixty with ‘their hot dry hands and parchment skins’.¹²⁶ Rosalind is more interested in the notorious Charles Ravage, a suitable name for one of the ‘Destroyers’, with his reported philosophy ‘that there is no code of morals to-day except the code of one’s own pleasure’.¹²⁷ Ravage is presented as being adored by his set and his generation, although everyone in the book except Rosalind is repelled by his unwholesome appearance and his unerring ability to make them feel uncomfortable. The basis for his notoriety, other than a hinted promiscuity, is never explained, he is simply presented as someone with new ideas about the individual’s role within society. Steele says Ravage is a best-selling novelist, and while that supports her contention that *Wintersmoon* is an attack on the selfish hedonism of the modern literati, there is nothing in the novel to say that this is in fact Ravage’s occupation. If Steele thinks Ravage represents the modern novelist, given Walpole’s claims that the moderns despised success then he would hardly have made Ravage a best-seller. Ravage represents modernity *en masse*, in all its disillusionment and destructive rejection of the past.

Rosalind is loved by Tom Seddon, Rachel’s grown-up son from *The Duchess of Wrexhe*. Rosalind is physically attracted to Tom but finds him intellectually uninspiring, nevertheless they marry. Almost inevitably, Janet falls in love with Wildherne and is able to present him with a child. Equally inevitably, given Walpole’s track record with *Fortitude* (1913), the

¹²⁵ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, pp. 7-10.

¹²⁶ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, p.132.

¹²⁷ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, p. 137.

child dies. Rosalind and Tom with nothing in common beyond sex become estranged. With the loss of Rosalind, and failing in his political plans, to join with like-minded individuals in a ‘club’ or party to uphold the best things about their class, their family, their traditions, and England, Tom commits suicide. Wildherne, following a breakdown and seeing Janet’s strength after the loss of their son, comes to realise he loves her. Janet and Wildherne, older than Rosalind, Tom, and Ravage, but of the same generation, represent old values for a modern world, while Rosalind and Ravage, now a couple, represent scientific-minded modernity.

Tom Seddon’s birth, at the end of *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, spoke of reconciliation and hope for the future, in *Wintersmoon* the young man succumbs to a neurosis and kills himself. Early in the book it is asserted that despite his ancestry he is English through and through, with none of his mother Rachel’s ‘Russian complexities’.¹²⁸ However, when Tom fails in his political ambitions and loses Rosalind, he appears to be suffering from a stereotypical Russian melancholy. As his mental state deteriorates, he visits his Uncle Johnny Beaminster, who thinks ‘how foreign he looks [...] not English at all’.¹²⁹ Tom even alludes to it himself:

‘Perhaps if I’d been English I might have managed it. You English can manage things because you’re all of a piece, but I’m not of a piece. My Russian blood laughs at the rest of me, and when I say, “I can conquer this,” my Russian self says, “Oh no you can’t”’.¹³⁰

Given that Tom lays the blame for his perceived weakness on his Russian blood, it is tempting to see Tom’s collapse as an encoding of Walpole’s apprehension that English values are being diluted by a cultural nihilism imported in ideas from the continent. Walpole certainly identifies what he sees as the modern English novel’s subsequent over-serious self-consciousness, as arising from the initially positive influence exerted by French and Russian

¹²⁸ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, p. 15.

¹²⁹ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, p. 497.

¹³⁰ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, p. 499.

literature.¹³¹ While expressing admiration for continental literature itself, Walpole questions whether one can ever understand ‘the literature of another country better than your own’.¹³² Tom’s inability to overcome his setbacks may be compared with Wildherne’s stoicism when faced with the death of his son. Wildherne initially bottles up his emotions, then after finally giving way to his grief he picks himself up and gets on with his marriage. There is something ‘un-English’ about the presentation of Ravage as well, possibly illegitimate he is ‘a little black man none too carefully groomed’, and later, ‘Funny chap, with his short, black, scrubby hair, his blue-black countenance, his staring eyes’.¹³³

The ‘moderns’ in *Wintersmoon* possibly have feet of clay. Rosalind, according to her sister, does not really believe in the modern philosophy she espouses. Rosalind expresses dismay at the thought of motherhood but then is enraptured and ‘broody’ when she meets Janet’s child. Ravage despite his self-contained demeanour of asking nothing and expecting nothing proves desperate to possess Rosalind. Conversely, while various characters describe Janet as naïve and old-fashioned, she is not only consistent in her beliefs and behaviour but is able to satirise the attitudes of the previous generation, as exemplified by her assessment of her mother-in-law.

‘Through her and her ministers, quietly, unobtrusively, a whole section of English life, social and religious is moving. The organisation is immense. God is served: England is kept against Democracy, Bolshevism, America, Roman Catholicism, the Hun, Jazz, cocktails, immorality, and Christian Science. We are poor but strong. We recognise no element of human evolution as anything but dangerous and of the Devil. There is no such thing as Time and Progress. There has been unfortunately a War, but we will disregard all consequences of it save that those that help us back to where we were before the War. We are blind and deaf and dumb to everything that the so-called New World is concerned with. There is no New World. Vive l’Albert Memorial!’¹³⁴

¹³¹ Walpole, *The English Novel*, pp. 20-25.

¹³² Walpole, *Reading*, pp. 52-53.

¹³³ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, pp. 46-49. While ‘black’ here probably isn’t being used as a racial epithet, the physical description of Ravage does seem to have racial, and indeed racist, overtones.

¹³⁴ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, pp. 175-76.

Janet's characterisation of this version of the old world accords with the impetus driving what Rosalind describes as her and Ravage's work. 'To help to rid the world of shams, of hypocrisy and sentimentality – above all, of the past, the rotten, clogging, hampering past.' [...] To build a new world when we've destroyed the old!'¹³⁵ Rosalind and Ravage relocate to Watendlath in the Lake District, a curious location from which to launch a new world but one that allows Walpole to hymn the beauties of that landscape. Janet and Wildherne prepare to return to their estate at Wintersmoon, which Janet describes as representing the things Rosalind and Ravage wish to tear down while she and her husband want to create new beauty from it, with something wonderful emerging from their mutual struggle. Walpole fears for the maintenance of old values in society and the preservation of tradition in the novel. Fictional portrayals of social conflict, and conflicts within the world of art and culture, are interchangeable codes for the threat to the conservatism that Walpole increasingly seems to espouse.

Up the hill backwards

In his original 'Dedicatory Letter' to *Wintersmoon*, addressed to the writer 'Elizabeth', Walpole recalls his plans for *The Rising City* and how he hid his idea for the trilogy rather than being thought presumptuous. Despite this, the original trilogy became the longer sequence *The Duchess of Wrexe*, *The Green Mirror*, *The Young Enchanted* and *Wintersmoon*, Walpole's idea of England between 1920 and 1927. He goes on to say that something else holds the books together but declines to share what that might be, perhaps it was 'romance'. In the Preface to the 1934 edition Walpole locates *Wintersmoon* particularly, as 'a reaction against the formless novel of ideas that was from 1925 to 1930 all the intellectual rage in

¹³⁵ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, p. 614.

England'.¹³⁶ Walpole goes on to identify Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and D. H. Lawrence as the great influences on the English novel at that time, but while acknowledging *Ulysses* as the most important British work of fiction since the War, and Joyce himself as genius and innovator, he suggests this influence was to prove disastrous for young novelists. Walpole also admires Lawrence's genius, but as a writer of descriptive prose and a poet, not as a novelist. He goes still further in a personal letter to a correspondent in 1940, while again praising Lawrence's descriptive writing, he bluntly describes him as 'a rotten novelist and as a pamphletier [sic] and so hysterical, humourless conceited'.¹³⁷ Walpole says that Joyce and Lawrence wished to rob the novel of the important properties of narrative and the creation of character. A contentious statement in that Lawrence's novels obviously have narrative drive, and while *Ulysses* is variously and facetiously described as a novel in which nothing happens, no one could argue that it is formless. Both writers created memorable characters, whose actions arise from motivations authentically portrayed.

Walpole struggles to be even-handed, offering that it was natural for young novelists to reject old forms and strive for originality, but that the psychological novel risked descending into superficial novelty. Walpole himself wished to uphold the traditions of narrative and character-creation while showing that he belonged to his own time, in retrospect he believes he should have ignored fashion. He hopes that what Joyce and Lawrence brought to the novel could be combined with older traditions, which as observed is supposed to have been Walpole's own intention. In any event he concedes that *Wintersmoon* turned out perhaps the most old-fashioned novel he ever wrote.¹³⁸

Unfortunately, Walpole's critical diplomacy collapses on closer scrutiny, appearing as a policy of dissembling at best and prevarication at worst. Four years before the original

¹³⁶ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, p. xi.

¹³⁷ Walpole, letter to C. D. J. Borwick, regarding D. H. Lawrence, October 21, 1940, Hugh Walpole archive, Keswick Museum, Record Number: KESMG: 1742.

¹³⁸ Walpole, *Wintersmoon*, p. xii.

publication of *Wintersmoon*, ten years before the Cumberland Edition with its back-handed compliments to Lawrence and Joyce, Walpole had been scathing about *Ulysses* in his privately-printed limited-edition autobiography *The Crystal Box* (1924). Suggesting that he is not qualified to judge the book as brilliant, or as a masterpiece of erudition, method and construction, as some have done, he claims that the book is devoid of ‘nobility, of fine feeling, of unselfishness, of kindness to others, of virtue or any restraint’.¹³⁹ Furthermore:

In “Ulysses” human nature is mean, bestial, furtive, preoccupied eternally with sex, discontented and deeply ironical. No one acts from fine motives – fine motives indeed are merely erotic emanations from some buried Freudian complex.¹⁴⁰

Walpole is content in public to praise Joyce’s brilliance of language and vision, but in the cloisters of the limited edition of *The Crystal Box*, he finds Joyce’s characters as lacking in reality as those of the best-selling popular novelists Ethel M. Dell and Hall Caine, and he values morality and fine-feeling above Joyce’s pitiless recording of surface realism. Here at least is support for Elizabeth Steele’s analysis of Walpole’s dismay at modern mores, but it is not selfish hedonism Walpole is railing against, it is a realism which, in his view, elevates the scatological and the erotic over romantic impulses such as tenderness and self-sacrifice. Arguably of course, Joyce’s genius lies in presenting his characters warts-and-all, thus allowing those characters to transcend the mundane through the brilliance of the writing.

Modestly, Walpole in revisiting writing *Wintersmoon* in his 1934 Preface does not refer to the novel as being one of the best-sellers of 1928. Despite its length, and its slow pace, it caught some sort of mood; published in March of 1928 it sold twenty thousand copies in Britain in its first month, and forty-five thousand in the USA rising to seventy-thousand by May of that year.¹⁴¹ Thornton Wilder’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* was a best-seller that year, as was Galsworthy’s *Swan Song*; Wilder perhaps a better

¹³⁹ Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁴⁰ Walpole, *The Crystal Box*, p. 159.

¹⁴¹ Hart-Davis, pp. 288-291.

exemplar of the ability to combine the modern and the traditional. Notable English modernist fiction of that year included Ford Madox Ford's *Last Post*, Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.

Walpole's attempts to engage with the opening decades of the twentieth century by creating a fictional history, would seem to be have been the ideal vehicle in which to carry forward his proposed novel of transition. In fact, the books display a narrowed focus, an aristocracy in decline bemoaning its loss of influence, an aimless middle-class, and most of all the literary 'battle of the brows'. This is not, in itself, a failure, it is simply not the ambitious project Walpole seems to suggest he had in mind when he set out to write *The Duchess of Wrexhe* (1914). He remained true to his task in following the main tradition of the English novel, but there is little evidence of the desire to combine that with modern techniques. Close study of the books themselves, and the attitudes expressed in them, and in Walpole's later commentaries, raises the question if an awareness of modern techniques and of modern psychology was ever intended to translate into a practical endorsement. If these stories of family conflict and literary endeavour were the sum of Walpole's output one could leave it there, but that would ignore his excursions into genre writing with his 'shockers', and his embrace of the full-blown historical romance which, while giving scope to his gothic tendencies, ironically witnessed an occasional engagement with a new style of writing.

PART TWO
Social Histories and Genre Writing
Chapter Four: Wild Excursions into the Macabre

Hugh Walpole's ambition to write traditional novels with an awareness of modern techniques and modern psychology echoed his ancestor Horace Walpole's preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto*, in which Horace wished to combine old-style romance with modern eighteenth-century realism, in the experiment that is judged to have instigated the Gothic genre.¹ Despite Hugh Walpole's expressed ambivalence towards Gothic writing in its original definition, as practised by Horace Walpole, Mrs Radcliffe, and Matthew Lewis, it is as a writer in an expanded Gothic aesthetic that he is referenced today, in indexes of fantastic literature, and in modern reissues of his work.² Independent publishers such as Valancourt Books in the USA, and Tartarus Press in the UK, through their release of new editions of rare and out-of-print titles, have revived interest in neglected genre authors, and both these imprints have published work by Hugh Walpole.³ This chapter will consider Walpole's approach to genre, and ask whether by adopting and adapting the form he achieved his ambition of combining traditional narrative drive with modern techniques.

A previous chapter noted Nicholas Daly's contention that popular romance fiction at the turn of the century was not the continuation of a romantic tradition, but a new distinctly modern phenomenon, compatible with literary modernism. Without refuting Daly's argument, that the popular romance was middle-Britain's 'narrative flagship' fulfilling an important cultural role, this study would argue that popular romance fiction at the fin de siècle was a further mutation in the evolution of the Gothic romance, rather than something

¹ Hugh Walpole, in Edward J. O'Brien, ed., *Best British Short Stories of 1926*, pp. 424-425, and Horace Walpole, 'Preface to the Second Edition', in *The Castle of Otranto*, p. 11.

² Walpole, *Walpole's Fantastic Tales* (Eugene, Bruin Books, 2015), and *The Collected Supernatural and Weird Fiction of Hugh Walpole: Vols. 1-3* (Driffield, Leonaur, 2018). See also: <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/w/hugh-walpole/> [accessed 03/12/2019].

³ Walpole, *Tarnhelm: The Best Supernatural Stories of Hugh Walpole* (Carlton-in-Coverdale, Tartarus Press, 2003); *The Killer and the Slain* (Richmond, Valancourt Books, 2014); *All Soul's Night* (Richmond, Valancourt Books 2016).

new.⁴ It is still possible to accept the popular romance as a form adapting to take on the challenges presented by the modern world, as arguably it has done throughout its history. Either way, it is possible to view Hugh Walpole's experiments in genre in Daly's terms, using the popular romance to examine and explain a cultural moment: an alternative modernism, or an alternative to modernism.

An approach to genre

Literary Genre was originally a basic form of classification system designating a work as poetry, drama, or prose, each with their subgenres. This had expanded, or loosened, by the 1900s to describe a plethora of popular categories such as the detective story, science fiction, historical fiction, also with their subgenres. Hugh Walpole's ambitious *Rising City* project, wherein he would endeavour to create a fictional social history of England, was a bid for recognition as a 'serious' writer, when his impulse and influences seemed to be in the direction of popular genre writing. Walpole may have approached his genre titles in the spirit of fun and jollity, which he ascribed to writers like Fielding and Scott, but they were also entertainment with a moral purpose in the tradition of the novel prior to 1870. After 1870, according to Walpole, the novel became a 'serious business [...] neither entertaining nor moral'.⁵ The contradiction here is that by larding his genre fiction with moral implications and heavy symbolism, Walpole showed that he wanted this strand of his writing to be taken just as seriously as the social history he embarked upon with the *Rising City*.

After he constructed his anodyne first novel *The Wooden Horse* (1909), Walpole's next three books, *Maradick at Forty* (1910), *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill* (1911), and *Prelude to Adventure* (1912), certainly qualify as genre titles. *Perrin* would now be termed a pedagogic or campus novel, a school story but one concentrating upon the masters, yet this is not the

⁴ Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the fin de siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880-1914*, p. 4.

⁵ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. ix.

genre that immediately springs to mind when reading it. Although Walpole claims *Perrin* is realistic, ‘real, sober life’, the plot’s melange of mental illness, hallucination, doppelgängers, and attempted murder, means it has more in common with the uncanny elements of the other two titles than with *The Wooden Horse*.⁶

Hugh Walpole uses the term ‘genre’ on different occasions and in different ways. He identifies *The Green Mirror* (1918) as a Family Novel, a genre ‘very popular with lady novelists’ and one which he would explore more thoroughly in his Herries series.⁷ *Jeremy at Crale* (1927) is his sole attempt in the school-story genre, that is a story concerning schoolchildren as opposed to the pedagogic novel *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill*.⁸ These are fairly specific uses of the term. In the Preface to the Cumberland Edition of *Maradick at Forty* he describes this, and *The Prelude to Adventure*, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925), and *Above the Dark Circus* (1931), as attempts at ‘a genre the most difficult in the world’, for which ‘a belief in the powers of evil’ is a requisite for success.⁹ These books were collected as *Four Fantastic Tales* in 1934, as they ‘all belong in the same world – a world [...] very thinly populated’.¹⁰ One assumes this is another reference to what Walpole sees as the scarcity of the literary romance, although he terms it as ‘an attempt to connect the two worlds - the world of spirit and the world of fact’.¹¹ As noted earlier, when considering titles by Machen, Blackwood, John Cowper Powys, Virginia Woolf, David Garnett and others, the evidence suggests that literary romance was alive and well at the time, and Walpole’s allusive utterances hardly help pin down his precise meaning. He goes on to more clearly define the particular branch of genre he is concerned with in the Preface to the Cumberland Edition of

⁶ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. viii.

⁷ Walpole, *The Green Mirror*, p. ix.

⁸ Walpole, ‘Preface’, *Jeremy at Crale*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), unpaginated. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹ Walpole, *Maradick at Forty*, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁰ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. vii.

¹¹ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. x.

Above the Dark Circus. He distinguishes between the ‘scientific-fantastic’ of H. G. Wells, and the ‘psychological-fantastic’ ‘drawn from this present world’, as represented by the work of Claude Houghton and M. P. Shiel, although the latter’s *The Purple Cloud* (1901) has more in common with Wells.¹² This distinction is one already made by Edith Birkhead, although she chooses terror ‘allied with psychology’ in Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), as opposed to the ‘scientific phantasy’ of Well’s *The Invisible Man* (1897).¹³ It is the psychological-fantastic novel that Walpole seeks to emulate.

Four Fantastic Tales

The rationale for Walpole’s grouping of the novels in *Four Fantastic Tales* seems to be that here the fantastic occurrence, or sensational set of circumstances, drives the plot, as opposed to the creation of a romantic atmosphere pervading a novel of events as in his romantic-realist novels. This principle seems to conform to Scott’s definition of romance as ‘a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents’.¹⁴ Hence, in *Maradick at Forty* (1910), Tony and Maradick attempt to wrest Janet away from her father Andreas Morelli, who may be the Devil, or a Pan-like supernatural entity. In *The Prelude to Adventure* (1912), Olva Dune, a Cambridge undergraduate, commits murder and gets away with it, but feels himself pursued by God. In *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925), an American expatriate with commitment issues encounters a sexual sadist in Cornwall. In *Above the Dark Circus* (1931), a starving war veteran in London becomes embroiled in a plot involving revenge, murder, and blackmail. Some other titles also cleave to the model of outlandish events providing the core of the plot. Mention has already been made of *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill*, while *The Old Ladies* (1924), a

¹² Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, pp. xi-xii.

¹³ Birkhead, p.196.

¹⁴ Walter Scott, *The Miscellaneous Prose Works, Volume VI: Chivalry, Romance, The Drama* (Edinburgh, Robert Cadell, 1834), p. 129 at Internet Archive, web, <https://archive.org/details/essaysonchivalr01scotgoog/page/n144> [accessed 20/02/2019].

claustrophobic tale of avarice and psychological bullying, and *The Inquisitor* (1935), centring around a murder, and the spiritual haunting affecting the cathedral town of Polchester, also have much in common with his genre titles. The posthumously published *The Killer and the Slain* (1942), is arguably Walpole's psychological-fantastic tour-de-force, with its startling plot concerning gender-fluidity, murder, and transformation.

Walpole says that his genre titles all belong in the same world, this genre-world of the psychological-fantastic, but he takes this further by isolating his genre narratives within self-contained environments, existing within the 'real' outside world but having only a tangential relationship to it. The world of Walpole's genre novels is recognisably twentieth-century England, but the environment in which the fantastic events occur is usually cut off from a wider reality. The Glebeshire of Walpole's *Maradick at Forty* and *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, a reimagined version of Cornwall, is almost a foreign country to its incomers, and signals, through the pagan-inspired Trellis Dance, a stronger affinity to a mythic past. *Prelude to Adventure* plays out amongst undergraduates in the insular world of Cambridge University, just as *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill* takes place in the run-down environs of Moffat's minor public school. *Above the Dark Circus*, with its suffering hero, the starving ex-serviceman Gunn, haunting the garish environs of Piccadilly Circus, does directly engage with a recognisably real outside world, in this case a darker version of Walpole's Rising City, but much of the action remains confined to a single flat. In *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016) Mark Fisher discusses this interplay and exchange between real and unreal worlds in fantastic fiction, particularly in relation to the stories of H. P. Lovecraft, as compared to the outright fantasy-world creations of Dunsany and Tolkien.¹⁵ Fisher's use of 'weird' and 'eerie' may prove a more helpful description of Walpole's fiction than that overburdened 'Gothic', or even of the 'fantastic' of his *Fantastic Tales*. Most definitions of the fantastic foreground the

¹⁵ Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London, Repeater Books, 2016), p. 19.

supernatural, or more drastically untoward events than play out in Walpole's fictions, however there is a common understanding of the exchange between 'real' and 'unreal' worlds.

Tzvetan Todorov writes that fantastic events should occur in a world recognisably our own; although he also suggests that the reader should be able to reject allegorical interpretations, which is where Walpole with his symbolic references clearly diverges.¹⁶ Rosemary Jackson in *The Fantastic* (1975) observes that:

Fantasy re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real' world which it seems to find so frustratingly finite.¹⁷

A perception of the 'real' world as 'frustratingly finite' is probably as accurate a description of Hugh Walpole's approach as it is possible to get. Freud, in his much-cited essay on 'The Uncanny' (1919), declares that uncanny effects best emerge when the writer 'pretends to move in the world of common reality'.¹⁸ All three commentators stress that the revelation of extraordinary events is more effective when presented in a mundane setting, with things happening when and where logic declares that they should not occur. Here is the difficulty with defining the fantastic in Walpole's fantastic fiction. The world he describes is recognisably our own, but while violent maniacs, paranoid undergraduates, sexual sadists, vengeful jailbirds, and twin blackmailers, are unlikely to be encountered on a regular basis, neither are they particularly other-worldly. Walpole's fantastic fiction is difficult to categorise because the novels so identified do not fall squarely within any single genre or sub-genre. There are supernatural elements in *Maradick at Forty* and *A Prelude to*

¹⁶ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 33. Subsequent references are to this title.

¹⁷ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London, Routledge, 2003), p.20.

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'The 'Uncanny' (1919), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (217-256) (London, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1955), pp. 247-250 at http://layoftheland.net/archive/ART6933-2012/weeks6-12/Freud_TheUncanny.pdf [accessed 23/09/2016].

Adventure, the first featuring a non-denominational ‘devil’, and the second a manifestation of the Christian God. *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* is essentially a rewrite of *Maradick* without the supernatural distractions. *Above the Dark Circus* is a gritty drama about the consequences of petty crime and revenge, and features a couple of murders. Walpole declines to offer his own definition of the fantastic, preferring to suggest the qualities required for its expression, its root in the battle between Good and Evil, and its successful literary technicians such as Nathaniel Hawthorne. Stripping away the symbolic aspects from Walpole’s stories, and reducing them to the merely prosaic, his version of the fantastic in the four novels under consideration hinges upon the intrusion of violence into everyday life, and the spiritual consequences for its perpetrators and victims.

If Walpole’s definitions of genre and the fantastic are rather less than precise, perhaps his fiction can be placed with reference to some of the commentators already mentioned. Freud’s examination of ‘The Uncanny’, while stimulating, is disappointing in that his recursive analysis of E. T. A. Hoffman’s ‘The Sandman’ (1816) ultimately comes to rest within a reductive emphasis on the castration complex.¹⁹ Freud’s ‘Uncanny’ itself plays upon the strangeness found within the familiar, and the familiarity one can experience with what is strange. Todorov also interrogates the uncanny, this time in comparison with the marvellous. Todorov claims that at the end of a story the reader must choose whether the events described are compatible with the ‘laws of reality’ and can be explained, in which case the work is ‘uncanny’, if the events require ‘new laws of nature’ then the work describes the ‘marvellous’.²⁰ Todorov suggests that both these ‘sub-genres’ of the fantastic are susceptible to explanation, the uncanny within the bounds of consensus reality, the marvellous by the acceptance of his new laws of nature; Todorov’s ‘fantastic’ requires ambiguity to survive to

¹⁹ Freud, ‘The ‘Uncanny’ (1919), p. 230, at http://layoftheland.net/archive/ART6933-2012/weeks6-12/Freud_TheUncanny.pdf [accessed 15/10/2020].

²⁰ Todorov, p. 41

the end of the narrative or beyond.²¹ Todorov's conception of the marvellous is somewhat different from the chance meetings of disparate realities in unexpected settings celebrated by the members of the Surrealist movement, who sought the 'sense of the marvellous suffusing everyday existence'.²² Mark Fisher offers two more genres to consider: the 'weird' and the 'eerie'. Fisher suggests Freud's uncanny is about a dissonance within the domestic world; Fisher's 'weird' is '*that which does not belong*' (his emphasis), which can never be reconciled with the 'homely' or its counter, the *unheimlich* of Freud's essay.²³ Fisher's evocation of the 'eerie' is more to do with agency, questions of 'existence and non-existence', unexpected presence or absence, a 'disengagement from [...] current attachments'.²⁴ Clearly extracting a definition of the fantastic genre from an analysis of its phenomena is prey to the same openness of interpretation, or downright instability, as a definition of genre itself.

Walpole's fantastic fiction usually sets up a juxtaposition between an authentically realised background of consensus reality, against which dramatic and atypical events unfold. With reference to the previous commentators, Walpole's stories can describe the cognitive dissonance manifested in an encounter with strange familiarity, suggest the need for new laws of reality or nature to explain what is happening, and confront questions of existence, presence, and their opposites, but the philosophical ramifications of these situations do not seem to interest him. Walpole pitches his protagonists into situations where they are faced with temptation, or must navigate the exigencies of limit-experience, and examines how they are changed by the encounter. This is what he means when he cites 'The history of the

²¹ Todorov, pp. 41-43.

²² Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (London, Picador Classics/Pan, 1987), p. 24. See also, Comte de Lautréamont, *The Dirges of Maldoror: An illustrated English translation of Les Chants de Maldoror*, trans. & illus. Gavin L. O'Keefe (Vancleave, Ramble House, 2018), p.275.

²³ Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, pp. 10-11.

²⁴ Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, pp. 11-13.

human soul and its relation to divinity' as the only study worth pursuing.²⁵ On a simpler note, given Walpole's combative relationship with modern literary realism, and his defence of his own romantic tendencies, one is left with the suspicion that he defines his fantastic tales as such because things occur in them that tend not to happen in the realist novel.

Rosemary Jackson considered the fantastic to be the manifestation of desire with a potentially subversive agenda, subversive to accepted 'norms' of behaviour.²⁶ This reading is cited as part of an anti-bourgeois trend that Chris Baldick and Robert Mighall take exception to in their essay 'Gothic Criticism'.²⁷ There is the occasional subversion of expectations in Walpole's fiction, but his sparing use of fantastic elements do not seem designed to subvert social or cultural mores, and generally his heroes display a vanilla regard for social conformity. Olva Dune is a notable exception, his crime in *The Prelude to Adventure* may be manslaughter rather than murder, but he intends to evade justice just the same, and appears remarkably uncontrite. Walpole can however, make juxtapositions that shatter the atmosphere of complacency surrounding an apparently conventional story. In his book about the child *Jeremy* (1919), the titular eight-year-old discovers that the fear his new governess has of losing her job gives him a power over her, something Walpole celebrates in an entirely unexpected way.

It was something almost abstract in its manifestations; it was something indecent, sinister, secret, foreign to his whole nature felt by him now for the first time, unanalysed, of course, but belonging, had he known it, to that world of which afterwards he was often to catch glimpses, that world of shining white faces in streets, of muffled cries from shuttered windows, of muttered exclamations, half caught, half understood. He was never again to be quite free from the neighbourhood of that half-world; he would never be quite sure of his dominance of it until he died.²⁸

²⁵Walpole, *The Secret City*, p. 28.

²⁶ Jackson, pp.179-180.

²⁷ Baldick and Mighall, *A Companion to the Gothic*, p. 209-228.

²⁸ Walpole, *Jeremy*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p.91. Subsequent references are to this edition.

A passage like this, with an implicit suggestion of sexual violence, is hardly to be expected to occur in the middle of a scene describing a nursery school-room battle-of-wills between a child and his governess. This sequence is highlighted by Peter Hitchens in his blog essay ‘Holiday Reading’. Hitchens writes: ‘What I think Walpole is writing about is the world of cruelty and ruthlessness, and of predatory sexual desire, that lies beyond the safe, lighted circle of family and familiarity, modesty and restraint’.²⁹ Walpole wrote three books about Jeremy, and his unsentimental appreciation of a child’s apprehension of an often-disturbing adult world gives the lie to the flyleaf description accompanying the collected edition, of a world of ‘snugness, confidence, security, [and] unmenaced peace’.³⁰

In the Preface to his genre collection, Walpole emphasises that when the novels first appeared the literary landscape did not favour romance, ‘Realism was the only critical colour for the novel, and so it has been ever since’.³¹ A literary landscape dominated by realists and the purveyors of fact is presented as the terrain with which Walpole has had to contend. That Walpole has successfully bypassed such obstacles to sell a great many books is nevertheless portrayed as just another barrier to critical recognition.

Frank Swinnerton was an opponent of Walpole’s literary excursions into the uncanny, writing of a ‘deep vein of hysteria which led to nightmare and the macabre’.³² Swinnerton thought Walpole’s experiments in the uncanny ‘bogus’, but Walpole defended his “spooks” as an expression of his absorption in the ‘history of the human soul – the moment and the place where and when the soul and body join and the country in *between* this world and the others’.³³ Walpole seems to have taken a certain amount of pleasure in repeating the

²⁹ Peter Hitchens, ‘Holiday Reading’, Peter Hitchens’s Blog, *MailOnline*, web at <https://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2011/08/holiday-reading.html> [accessed 18/03/2019].

³⁰ Anon., wrapper description to *The Jeremy Stories: Jeremy; Jeremy and Hamlet; Jeremy at Crale* (London, Macmillan, 1941).

³¹ Walpole, in *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. viii.

³² Swinnerton, p.40.

³³ Swinnerton, p.41.

admonishments he received, and noting that his critics viewed his propensity for the macabre as an obstacle to critical success, he quotes Arnold Bennett as urging him to abandon his “romantic falsity”.³⁴ Charles Morgan, in his history of the publisher, *The House of Macmillan: 1843-1943* (1943), is uncompromising in listing a taste for the uncanny amongst those of Walpole’s failings:

Why did he make so many wild excursions into the macabre, knowing as he must have known in his heart, that they led him to damaging excesses? Partly because, in their darker aspects, they exercised over him an irresistible fascination; partly for the flatly contrary reason that he was ingenuous about them and could give himself cold shivers with no notion that he might be failing to communicate them.³⁵

To be fair to Walpole, these reactions seem to be somewhat exaggerated; compared to Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood his excursions into weird territory tend to be Sunday outings rather than safaris. Within his output of short fiction, a significant number of stories are concerned with the supernatural, but the supernatural short story was a popular medium and counted Henry James, Edith Wharton, and May Sinclair among its many practitioners.

Walpole’s defence of his excursions into romance, genre, and the macabre, indicate that, with his reference to the human soul, he viewed his genre titles as a medium for an exploration into the mysticism and spirituality one might associate with the Romantic movement. These are themes which he feels cannot be expressed by realism. As for the cheerleaders of the Walpole tradition, while noting the immaturity of technique apparent in the first of the genre titles *Maradick at Forty*, Marguerite Steen was more positive:

In *Maradick at Forty* Mr Walpole declares his allegiance to the Hawthorne tradition in giving out unmistakably that note of symbolism which echoes in crescendo through his later works; a symbolism typically romantic in form and of a twofold nature: one part operating in the direction of the embodiment of abstract quality in human form, which is direct, elementary and Bunyanesque symbolism, and the other in the use of inanimate objects to focus the emotions of human beings.

Good and Evil; here are the characters of a Morality play, of the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, of Grimm’s Fairy Tales. Walpole presents them in his own idiom, that is to

³⁴ Walpole, in *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. ix.

³⁵ Morgan, *The House of Macmillan (1843-1943)* (London, Macmillan, 1943), p. 215.

say, through his own symbol, but they are no more mistakeable than their older prototypes. There is something Gothic about them; the shadows of their grey stone images lie across the pages of the Walpole novels, although, as his art develops, it is interesting to observe how Mr Walpole learns to disguise them.³⁶

Steen may be the first commentator to apply the ‘Gothic’ epithet to Hugh Walpole’s work, modern commentators are happy to apply the term liberally. Again, given Walpole’s dismissal of that genre, when he described its puppet characterisations being like something out of old Mystery Plays with personified Virtues and Vices, it is uncertain that he would have entirely welcomed Steen’s assessment.³⁷ While Walpole approached his genre novels just as seriously as he did his other titles, coating them in a lacquer of symbolism, he could also be dismissive, using the sort of ironic distancing technique a genre writer employs to suggest a logical interpretation of fantastic events. This defensiveness suggests that while asserting his affiliation to the macabre he was aware it damaged his critical reputation, and he wouldn’t have known that genre fiction would one day receive serious academic and critical attention.

Gothic Moderns

Clemence Dane declared in 1930 that World War One had sent writers back to the study of evil, a study which could only be handled by romantics.³⁸ Fred Botting on the other hand suggests that Gothic writing in particular took a sort of sabbatical during the early part of the twentieth century, with technological and economic advancement leaving little time for monsters, and no apparent need for the nostalgia that haunted the enlightenment. Botting goes on to say ‘The all-too-real horrors of World War 1 pushed fantastic terrors aside’.³⁹

This is a theme that Walpole anticipates in his preface to *Four Fantastic Tales* (1932) when he writes, ‘Stories about the Devil *must* seem absurd to a generation that has seen the Great

³⁶ Steen, pp. 93-94.

³⁷ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, pp. xxiv-xxv.

³⁸ Dane, p.151.

³⁹ Botting, *Gothic*, p. 13.

War and the Economic War that followed it. Hard facts have been too real to be disregarded'.⁴⁰ Whether Botting's claim and Walpole's observation are borne out by publishing history is open to debate; the most cursory review indicates that the author Arthur Machen, whose work hinted at hidden worlds of pagan and gothic terror lurking below our own, enjoyed a post-war boom in the 1920s.⁴¹ In 1929 H. P. Lovecraft named Algernon Blackwood, Lord Dunsany, M. R. James, and Arthur Machen as his 'Modern Masters' of horror, although 'horror' here is a catch-all term for all shades of fantastic fiction.⁴² The original Gothic flourished while Europe was in turmoil from Revolutionary Wars, and an upending of the political and social order that would be mirrored by the cultural upheavals that followed the Great War of 1914-18. Charlie Connelly, making obvious parallels with contemporary anxieties in his review for *The New European*, comparing Sarah Perry's *Melmoth* (2018) with its inspiration, Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), observes that 'Gothic literature always seems to enjoy a resurgence in troubled times'.⁴³

While traditional authors of the fantastic such as Machen and Blackwood continued to ply their trade undisturbed in the post-war period, contemporary critics of the Gothic have detected its presence in modernist writing, leading Alexandra Warwick, adopting a contrarian stance, to ask how D. H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf came, 'to fall into the Gothic net'.⁴⁴ Without going too deeply into her wide-ranging argument, Warwick notes that while the original Gothic dealt in unspeakable repressed trauma, the experience and expression of

⁴⁰ Walpole, in *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. viii.

⁴¹ Arthur Machen (1863-1947). Machen's writing career blossomed against the backdrop of the decadent movement of the 1890s, particularly with the success of his sexually-charged horror novella *The Great God Pan* (1894), in which a perverse experiment unleashes an evil force from another dimension. See also 'The Friends of Arthur Machen' at <http://www.arthurmachen.org.uk/index.html> [accessed 03/11/2019].

⁴² H. P. Lovecraft, 'X. The Modern Masters', in 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', unpaginated, at: <https://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx> [accessed 09/10/2020].

⁴³ Charlie Connolly, 'The Return of a Gothic Masterpiece', in *The New European*, issue 120, 15/11/2018-21/11/2018 (Norwich, Archant, 2018), pp. 42-43.

⁴⁴ Alexandra Warwick, 'Feeling Gothicky', *Gothic Studies* (Manchester), Vol. 9, Issue 1, May 2007, p. 6, at: <https://search-proquest-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/docview/216244130/fulltextPDF/D702548F65844B21PQ/1?accountid=14697> [accessed 13/10/2020]. Subsequent references to this source.

trauma is now almost a prerequisite of modern life, and ‘Gothic’ has become an ubiquitous adjectival ‘gothic’.⁴⁵ This comes down to definition once again, and the ubiquity of the term as noted by Warwick is essentially the same as that observed by Punter in the 1980s.⁴⁶

However, while Punter could go on to examine the migration and transmutation of the gothic mode in a piece of ground-breaking criticism, Warwick has identified a situation where Gothic has now become a lazy shorthand. These arguments would be academic if the term wasn’t so liberally applied to the work of Hugh Walpole who, as previously noted, saw the Gothic only in its original sense, and was as quick to dismiss it as Virginia Woolf had been in her review of Edith Birkhead’s study of the Gothic Romance.

If the term must be used, it is worth considering what has given rise to the detection of the Gothic presence in modernist writing. E. M. Forster wrote in 1927 that fantasy was as important to the work of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and D. H. Lawrence as it was to William Beckford or Walter de la Mare.⁴⁷ Sam Wiseman sees Eliot, Woolf, and Lawrence as being sensitive to the ‘spiritual and spectral’, and relocating a new form of the Gothic from its rural roots, to an urban London haunted by the ghosts of the war-dead.⁴⁸

The fact that violence and slaughter had been unleashed upon the European world on an unprecedented scale seemed to undermine the potency and relevance of traditional Gothic and supernatural themes, but at the same time writers were unusually preoccupied with death and spirituality, hence [...] the development of narratives that are not explicitly supernatural, but which nonetheless explore these concerns through subtlety and undertone.⁴⁹

Wiseman’s reference to the scale of the slaughter in the First World War seems prefigured in Eliot’s lines from *The Waste Land* (1922): ‘A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many/I

⁴⁵ Warwick, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Punter, *The Literature of Terror: Vol. 1: The Gothic Tradition*, pp. 1-3.

⁴⁷ Forster, pp.102-103.

⁴⁸ Sam Wiseman, *Locating the Gothic in British Modernity* (Clemson, Clemson University Press, 2019), p. 110. Subsequent references are to this title. Chapter Seven of this study will see modernist writers once more turning their attention to the countryside in rural pageants.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

had not thought death had undone so many'.⁵⁰ Hugh Walpole detected Gothic trauma in the work of Virginia Woolf and manipulated it for his own purposes. In his autobiographical fragment *The Apple Trees* (1932), Walpole quotes the passage from Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) where the sensitive Neville hears the cook talking about a man who has had his throat cut, and finds himself paralysed with fear, the incident forever connected with the apple trees he can see through a window.⁵¹ Walpole relates the passage to an incident in his own unhappy childhood where, having rebuffed what reads like a sexual advance from an elderly female family friend, he flees into the apple-orchard and faints, his 'childhood [...] ended'.⁵² The Gothic borrowings by the modernists seem to share motivation with the Romantic poets who, as noted by Michael Gamer, liberally harvested the Gothic tropes they condemned, on the basis of putting them to legitimate 'intellectual and ideological uses'.⁵³

Fantastic Tales themes and approaches

Walpole says he conceived the idea for his first genre title *Maradick at Forty* under the influence of E. T. A. Hoffman and Nathaniel Hawthorne, and also cites *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) by his mentor Henry James, Joseph Henry Shorthouse's romance of ideas *John Inglesant* (1881), Pater's short stories, and Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905). He claims that all these writers, excepting possibly Forster whose book he describes as 'uncanny', were concerned with the powers of Good and Evil.⁵⁴ Forster writing in his 'Commonplace Book', did not believe in the existence of evil, and thought it poorly served by English fiction in any case, presented either as 'misconduct' or bound up with a vague

⁵⁰ T. S. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London, Book Club Associates, 1977), p. 62.

⁵¹ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London, The Hogarth Press, 1931), in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, location: 28934 of 182519.

⁵² Walpole, *The Apple Trees*, pp. 17-18. At the risk of reading too much into this passage, it does seem like an early realisation by Walpole of his sexual orientation.

⁵³ Michael Gamer, 'Gothic Fictions and Romantic Writing in Britain', *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, pp. 95-98.

⁵⁴ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. ix.

sense of mystery, but he agreed that most writers thought it ought to exist if only to provide a foundation for a plot.⁵⁵ It is hard to see why Walpole includes Forster here except perhaps as the ‘realistic’ correlative to the romance of the other influences, although Darvay has linked Forster to the redefinition of Englishness through the Gothic, by the ‘Gothicizing’ of Italy in *A Room With a View* (1908).⁵⁶

Walpole suggests that the ‘Powers’ of Good and Evil had been transformed ‘into glands and ducts, into atoms and electrons’, a version of Robert Hume’s later observation that evil had been explained away sociologically.⁵⁷ Romance, the territory in which Walpole engages with the battle between Good and Evil, depends upon the ability to reconcile two worlds, by ‘mingling opposed atmospheres’ presumably fantasy and realism, and ‘telling a story that will not flag, with characters that are more than puppets’.⁵⁸ Here Walpole sets out his whole credo, merging the romantic tradition with latter-day realism, the importance of narrative, and the creation of believable characters, to provide the credibility that he thought the old Gothic writers with their puppet characterisations lacked.

The novels in *Four Fantastic Tales* have more in common than just being set in unreal worlds within the real world. The heroes of Walpole’s genre novels are romantic heroes, their credentials signalled to the reader by their cultural tastes and by other symbolic trappings. Tony Gale in *Maradick at Forty* (1910) loves poetry, quoting Tennyson with approval and describing the night of the Trellis Dance in terms of Shelley. Charles Percy Harkness in *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* reads Browning’s poetry, as well as *To Paradise*, a romantic novel first introduced in *Maradick at Forty* as the work of Milly Lester’s novelist husband Fred. He is also introduced with references to his clothing being

⁵⁵ Forster, ‘Appendix A: Extracts from Forster’s Commonplace Book’, *Aspects of the Novel*, p. 170.

⁵⁶ Darvay, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁷ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. ix.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

like ‘chain armour’ suggesting that he will be a knight errant in the story to come.⁵⁹ In *The Prelude to Adventure* (1912) Olva Dune becomes aware of the presence of God at the precise moment he accidentally kills a hated fellow undergraduate. Dune is another ‘lonely knight’, literally the archetypal romantic hero.⁶⁰ Inspired by the childhood memory of an engraving of a knight and his ‘spectre horse’, and ‘lonely in a world that was contemptible’, he sees himself estranged from the world by the consequences of his actions, alone except for the recently manifested deity.⁶¹ Richard Gunn in *Above the Dark Circus* carries Lockhart’s translation of *Don Quixote* with him as a sort of talisman throughout his adventure. *Don Quixote* (1605) seems a particularly potent symbol for what Walpole claims he is setting out to do. Not only is he inspired by his own reading of romances, particularly those by Scott, with his blend of tradition and modern technique he is presumably attempting to adopt the form for a modern age, as Cervantes did. Having introduced his own knights errant, Walpole then engages them on chivalric quests to save young women from peril. The resulting adventures involve a confrontation with limit-experience, encounters that push them to the edge of comprehensible existence after which they have to redefine themselves.

This study has already made reference to Hugh Walpole’s first genre title *Maradick at Forty* (1910), where that book stumbles is in the uncertain integration of realistic and fantastic events, exemplified by the physical splitting of the action between the Man at Arms Hotel and the town of Trellis. The Hotel, where the ‘realistic’ events of Maradick’s flirtation with Milly Lester, and the class-based manoeuvrings of the other guests take place, is on a hill, part of the town but above it. The fantastic part of the narrative, the pagan Trellis dance and Morelli’s attempts to manipulate the relationship between Janet and Tony, literally takes place below the realistic world of social niceties and petty infidelity. There is no reason why

⁵⁹ Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. 7. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁶⁰ Walpole, *The Prelude to Adventure*, p.12.

⁶¹ Walpole, *The Prelude to Adventure*, pp. 11-12.

such a device could not work, but in Walpole's admittedly inexperienced hands what results is two seemingly disconnected storylines. Walpole knows that the fantastic aspect of his story must be incorporated into a conventionally recognisable world, but he insists upon returning to that world in counterpoint as if to emphasise the 'reality' of his setting. Walpole also introduces two heroes, the romantic hero Tony, naïve and unassailably optimistic, and the down-to-earth Maradick fighting his own demons. The relationship between Maradick and Mrs Lester is presented as a somewhat tawdry comparison to the innocent romance of Tony and Janet Morelli, but too often distracts from the fantastic Morelli adventure, which ultimately is of greater interest. Walpole must have acknowledged the shortcomings in his realisation of what was still an interesting plot, because in 1925 he rewrote the book. Trimmed of distractions, and with a hero combining the romantic aspirations of Tony with the troubled psyche of Maradick, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* is a shorter and sharper genre novel.

Portrait of a Man with Red Hair

In his 'Dedicatory Letter', prefacing the original 1925 publication of *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, Walpole reiterated some of his concerns regarding modern literature: the unfavourable climate for romance over the previous two decades, whether it was allowable for stories to be enjoyed, and the use of 'readable' as an almost derogatory term.⁶² Walpole again invoked the names of Hawthorne and Hoffman, and mentioned Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué's tale of spiritual chivalry *Sintram and His Companions* (1814), but shied away from any allegorical reading of his own work, 'This is a tale and nothing but a tale'.⁶³ Continuing on to the epigraph, Walpole quotes Fielding from Book VIII Chapter I of *Tom Jones* (1749), on the author's freedom to deal with wonderful events outside of the reader's experience, by

⁶² Walpole, 'Dedicatory Letter', *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. vii

⁶³ Walpole, 'Dedicatory Letter', *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. viii

(Fielding quoting Pope) combining “the credible with the surprising”.⁶⁴ Inevitably, despite his denials, having freighted the story with all this literary baggage Walpole leaves himself open to a charge of protesting too much, and in the new Preface to *Four Fantastic Tales* he acknowledged that his dismissal of the story at the time, as just a tale and nothing more, was not being entirely honest with the reader.⁶⁵ By 1934 and the Cumberland Edition, three years after *Four Fantastic Tales*, Walpole is again downplaying any symbolic significance to the story, joking about the book’s reception, and suggesting that the ‘real’ *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* would be far more shocking. Once again however Walpole cannot resist a gnomic utterance; while refuting any symbolic significance, he suggests that *Portrait* and its fantastic companions are ‘candle-light books’, wherein ‘the scenes are lit by a flickering, uncertain illumination which creates a shadow for everything, behind everything, and the shadow is more important than the reality’.⁶⁶

Portrait of a Man with Red Hair was initially commissioned by Arthur Vance for serialisation with the *Pictorial Review* when Walpole was in New York after a lecture tour in 1923. Walpole completed the book in under two months, which reflects his view of it as ‘a simple shocker’ and an amusement, but also anticipates the creative freedom he would bring to his equally rapidly-written late ‘shocker’ *The Killer and the Slain* (1942).⁶⁷ In the event Vance got cold feet at the content and passed on publication, but Walpole’s American publisher George Doran managed to place the serialisation with *Cosmopolitan* for a lower fee. This setback appears to have shaken Walpole’s confidence in the book, and he blamed his dissatisfaction on having allowed himself to be induced to produce something purely for money, as he had done with the short story collection *The Thirteen Travellers* (1921). The

⁶⁴ Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. ix.

⁶⁵ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. x.

⁶⁶ Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. xii. This may be a variation on Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, see <https://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/cave.htm> [accessed 20/01/2020].

⁶⁷ Hart-Davis, p. 233.

work appeared as a book in 1925 and did not bring the disapprobation he evidently feared, thus allowing for his subsequent casual manner when discussing it.⁶⁸

Portrait of a Man with Red Hair is a modern tale of chivalry, with a psychological twist in the depiction of its mentally-tortured villain Crispin, the red-haired man of the title. The book is a pared-down rewrite of *Maradick at Forty*, with no attempt at parallel storylines. The plot briskly follows a structure which might be summarised as problem, rescue, reversal, peril, and salvation. The hero Charles Percy Harkness an expatriate American, comes to the service of a damsel in distress, falls in love with her, but sets aside his own feelings to rescue her from a loveless marriage and reunite her with her lover, finding his own moral and physical courage in the process. As the story opens Harkness is journeying by train to Trellis, urged to visit there after a chance meeting with James Maradick. Recognising something in Harkness, Maradick offers him access to a limit-experience, ‘Do you *want* adventure, romance, something that will pull you right out of yourself and test you, show you whether you *are* real or no, give you a crisis that will change you for ever? Do you want it?’.⁶⁹

Harkness is introduced with a description of the flaws he must overcome before his eventual transformation:

He was dressed with exceeding neatness, but his clothes had something of the effect of chain armour. [...] His neatness and immaculate spotless purity of dress showed a fastidiousness that granted his cowardice an excuse.⁷⁰

Harkness’s lack of courage derives from his commitment issues, he invests more of himself in his collection of etchings than in corporeal relationships. A romantic young man with romantic ideas who will be called upon to do good deeds, but whose romantic notions form a barrier to intimacy, and a shying away from the reality of personal relationships and the more unpleasant aspects of real-life. To develop as a person Harkness will be required to shed his

⁶⁸ Hart-Davis, p.239 & 265.

⁶⁹ Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. 17.

⁷⁰ Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. 7.

armour and make a connection with the people around him, a process which begins with his shedding of inhibitions by taking part in the Trellis Dance, that particular rite resurfacing from *Maradick at Forty*.

Harkness aims to rescue a young woman, Hesther, from the clutches of her husband Herrick and Crispin her abusive father-in-law. Crispin is a sadist torturing his daughter-in-law as part of a perverse experiment. Following abuse by his own father, Crispin has come to believe in a cruel God who derives His power from inflicting punishment. The route to power is through mastering pain and then inflicting it upon others so that they may learn to master it in turn, thus creating a consensus of enlightenment through suffering. Crispin's memories of his surgeon father's experiments in torture anticipate Leo Marx's script for Michael Powell's film *Peeping Tom* (Michael Powell (Theatre), 1960), in which disturbed killer Mark Lewis was used as a guinea pig for his psychologist father's investigations into the basis of fear. Harkness, and Dunbar, Hesther's childhood sweetheart, rescue the threatened girl, but the fugitives become lost in a sea-fog and inevitably find themselves back at Crispin's door, where they are recaptured and subdued by his Japanese manservants using martial arts. Harkness, like Maradick prior to his final confrontation with Morelli, has a heavily symbolic and revelatory dream. In a Dantesque vision of purgatory he is forced to confront some of his sins, the sins themselves, gossip, spitefulness, and petty theft, seem comparatively mild to be causing him so much anguish and guilt. Harkness has a great fear of physical pain, but once the reality of physical torture becomes imminent, he experiences a sense of liberation. In a *grand guignol* finale, Harkness, Dunbar, and a local fisherman Jabez who has helped them, are stripped naked and bound to pillars on the uppermost floor of the tower, where they are tortured by a knife-wielding Crispin, appropriately dressed in white silk pyjamas, and by this time having crossed the threshold into madness. His eyes gouged out by Crispin, Jabez

snaps his bonds and hurls his tormentor from the tower to his death, in what Elizabeth Steele observes is a somewhat unconvincing invocation of the *deus ex machina*.⁷¹

Ironically, Harkness, constrained and limited by a plethora of hang-ups at the start of the book, is at last liberated by his experiences in a near-vindication of Crispin's philosophy. The crucial difference is that Harkness falls in love with Hesther but gives her up to Dunbar, the revelation of his own moral courage providing the physical courage to withstand Crispin's knife. While the psychology explored by Walpole in the novel is of a sensational variety, as befits a shocker, it at least has the merit of an internal logic.

Walpole is dismissive of the book in his preface to the Cumberland Edition, claiming he only discovered that he 'was supposed to have written a treatise on sadism' once the book had appeared.⁷² In that preface Walpole says that Crispin was both intended as a symbol and then was not a symbol, and that he shared a pathos with any fairy-tale monster set apart by the grotesquerie of his appearance. Walpole suggests that the book should be read as it was written, 'as the lightest and simplest of adventures'.⁷³ Dunbar at one point declares to Harkness that their adventure 'wouldn't make a bad shocker [...] Only you'd never be able to make Crispin convincing'.⁷⁴ Dunbar's throwaway observation, on the authenticity of the book that he is a character in hinging on the credibility of its villain, seems to be a metafictional joke, not unlike Cardenio in *Don Quixote* (1605) remarking that the Hidalgo's adventures are 'so weird and wonderful that I can't believe that if anyone wanted to invent such a story he'd be clever enough to do it'.⁷⁵ The suggestion that Crispin isn't a convincing villain, serves to underline the essential 'unreality' of genre, and the author's almost apologetic approach to it. This distancing effect clashes somewhat resoundingly with the

⁷¹ Steele, p. 83.

⁷² Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. xi.

⁷³ Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. xii.

⁷⁴ Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. 240.

⁷⁵ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, trans. John Rutherford, *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (London, Penguin, 2003), p. 279.

contortions Walpole adopts when writing about his genre titles elsewhere in his prefaces. If Crispin's villainy is to be explained away in terms of his psychology, 'glands and ducts, [...] atoms and electrons', then Walpole runs the risk of dismissing the existence of that evil which he is convinced is a reality.⁷⁶ Dunbar's comment doesn't so much let his author off the hook as emphasise the uncertainty of his approach. Having provided a genre-friendly psychological explanation for Crispin's behaviour in the novel, the abused becoming abusers in their turn, Walpole undermines his own theme in his preface, by dismissing the 'treatise on sadism' and suggesting Crispin was a 'fairy-tale' villain created by his appearance.⁷⁷

Clemence Dane joins in with this merry-go-round of significance and dismissal in her book *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* (1930), claiming that *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* marks the perfecting of the author's 'special contribution to the traditive novel', the presentation of 'two stories in one', in other words a story with a sub-text.⁷⁸ It is Dane's contention, via the literary equivalent of a nod and a wink, that despite Walpole's protestations the novel does have a serious intention, but such is the nature of the message that it seeks to communicate it can only be transmitted within a narrative of unpalatable events, and such a narrative can only be made palatable to the reading public by presenting it as a simple 'shocker'. In Dane's analysis Harkness has two possible souls facing two possible paths: the tainted evil represented by Crispin and the unsullied goodness represented by Hesther, almost the 'good' and 'bad' 'fathers' of an orphan narrative. Dane believes that following the end of the war, and a consequent obfuscation surrounding the nature of Good and Evil, the reader of *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* will recognise Harkness as an Everyman, facing up to challenges in the process of rewriting personal codes of behaviour for a new age.⁷⁹ Dane seems to be anticipating Nicholas Daly's later argument that popular romance fiction enabled readers to

⁷⁶ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. ix.

⁷⁷ Walpole, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, p. xi-xii.

⁷⁸ Dane, p. 221.

⁷⁹ Dane, p. 228.

navigate cultural change. Orlo Williams in the *TLS* notes Walpole's somewhat wistful dismissal of the book as allegory, and counters Dane's reading of the book's reception by suggesting that 'a preoccupation with moral issues [...] may disappoint for some readers that anticipation of the purely horrific', and that Harkness ends up 'a regular hero of Browning's', and the book as containing more of Hawthorne than Hoffman.⁸⁰

Trimmed of Walpole's prefaces, the supportive commentary of Clemence Dane, and all their to-and-fro of critical assertion and denial, *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* is a serviceable psychological-fantastic thriller in its own right. Walpole's use of genre is still a world away from spy fiction, police procedurals, detective stories, supernatural tales, and science fiction, where concept and plot are intended as the main interest of the 'yarn'. His intention appears to be to transform the genre novel, smuggling in moral or philosophical messages about personal codes of behaviour by disguising them within a simple shocker. Walpole would continue to mine this seam in the genre novels that followed.

The Prelude to Adventure

If Walpole had attempted to introduce the Devil as one of the characters in *Maradick at Forty*, in *The Prelude to Adventure* (1912) God is a palpable presence for the book's hero Olva Dune. "There is a God after all." That was the immense conviction that faced him as he heard, slowly, softly, the leaves, the twigs, settle themselves after that first horrid crash which the clumsy body had made.'⁸¹ This, the opening to the first chapter, called 'Last Chapter' (the last chapter is called 'First Chapter'), occurs moments after Olva Dune has killed his hated school-fellow Carfax with a single blow, following Carfax's boasts about the

⁸⁰ Orlo Williams, 'Portrait of a Man with Red Hair', *Times Literary Supplement* (London, England), 15 Oct. 1925: 672, Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive, Web. at <http://find.galegroup.com/libezproxy.open.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200032270&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> [accessed 28/02/2020].

⁸¹ Walpole, *The Prelude to Adventure*, p. 1.

ruining of a local girl. Consequent with the confused feelings aroused by the knowledge that he has committed murder, Dune has had a sensation of the certain existence of the supernatural: 'In that sudden after silence he had known beyond any question that might ever again arise, that there was now a God – God had watched him'.⁸² Walpole's form of words, that 'now', even suggests that the Divinity has been summoned into very existence at the instant of Dune's crime.

That Dune should believe his actions have drawn the attention of a supreme being is entirely consistent with the character that Walpole subsequently delineates. Dune is described as self-absorbed, brilliant, indolent, contemptuous; 'regarded by every one with distrust, admiration, excitement'.⁸³ Dune is the first in a line of Walpole's 'young adult' characters who, promising great things at University, whether in games of Rugby Football or moral leadership, usually both, fumble or decline the challenge and momentarily lose their way. Peter Wescott follows this path in *Fortitude* (1913), as does Jeremy Cole in *Jeremy at Crale* (1927). What makes Dune different is that for the most part he doesn't care:

He despised all the world save only his father. He had gone through his school-life and was now passing through his college-life as a man travels through a country that has for him no interest and no worth but that may lead, once it has been traversed, to something of importance and adventure.⁸⁴

The Prelude to Adventure is not that adventure of course, it is the tempering process in the forging of the man that Dune will become, and consequently Walpole can create an ambiguous character with both flaws and finer qualities. After killing Carfax with a single unpremeditated blow, Dune at first accepts his fate, determining that poison would save him, and the family name, from the gallows, but gradually Dune realises that he might get away with his crime.

⁸² Walpole, *The Prelude to Adventure*, p. 1-2.

⁸³ Walpole, *The Prelude to Adventure*, p.6.

⁸⁴ Walpole, *The Prelude to Adventure*, p.6.

Dune does not come across as a tragic figure atoning for his actions. There is a dramatic disconnection between his self-analysis, and the burden of knowledge of what he has done, and his subsequent behaviour. Dune does everything he can to evade exposure, prevaricating even as some of his school-fellows begin to suspect the truth. Dune attracts the adoration of the pathetic Bunning, ‘that soft, blithering, emotional, religious, middle-class maniac’, who has joined a University evangelical group as much to be part of something as indicative of any religious zeal on his part.⁸⁵ Dune treats Bunning with a mixture of kindly contempt and outright bullying, to the extent that Bunning attempts to confess to the murder of Carfax in order to save his hero.⁸⁶ More complex is Dune’s relationship with Craven, the late Carfax’s doting friend and apologist. Driven to distraction by his friend’s murder, Craven had already deduced that, despite appearances to the contrary, Dune had hated Carfax. After finding Dune’s silver match-box at the scene of the crime and unable to expose him, Craven suffers a breakdown. Dune is also compromised by the fact that he has fallen for Craven’s sister Margaret, who wishes for him to help her brother.

There is a complexity about *The Prelude to Adventure* which is absent from the rather superficial psychology of Walpole’s later work. The book brought praise from Carl Gustav Jung, whom Walpole was to meet in Zurich in July 1930, after presenting a lecture where the psychotherapist was in the audience. Jung wrote to Walpole in August that same year with his thoughts on the book:

When I talked to you in Zurich I was under the painful impression that I never read a book you have written. Since then I have found out that I have read a very decent number of them. I usually can’t stand the typical literary writing. It bores me too much. But some of your novels, particularly the story of the student who committed a murder have left absolute traces in my mind. I think the *Prelude* is a psychological masterpiece. If only such people had more often the chance to commit a decent murder – but I have seen “pale criminals” only. Minor crimes done by the right people have ordinarily a wonderfully humanizing effect, a decided moral

⁸⁵ Walpole, *The Prelude to Adventure*, p. 24.

⁸⁶ Walpole, *The Prelude to Adventure*, p. 246.

improvement. This seems to be the true reason why God is good and even better than any mortal.⁸⁷

Jung's reference to "pale criminals" relates to Nietzsche's chapter in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1883), where the philosopher considers the actions of the criminal who, lacking self-knowledge, confuses a desire to commit murder with the desire to rob, and consequently justifies as expediency the act of committing murder in the course of that robbery, but then suffers remorse for his actions. Nietzsche deplores the evil inherent in this form of self-justification and self-deception.⁸⁸

Nietzsche's exploration of the 'superman' in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* is significant to literary murderers, such as Raskolnikov in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1886), and Brandon and Granillo in Patrick Hamilton's 1929 play *Rope*. The university students Brandon and Granillo believe that their intellectual superiority gives them licence to commit murder and will also ensure that they evade justice, Raskolnikov, an admirer of Napoleon, believes that certain exceptional individuals are above the law and that ends justify means. Believing themselves to be Nietzschean supermen, Brandon and Grillo and Raskolnikov are actually his 'pale criminals'. Dune does not commit murder because he feels himself superior, or to prove that superiority, as Raskolnikov, Brandon, and Granillo do; his act is wholly unpremeditated, and a *crime passionnel*. Dune's superiority and contempt for his fellows does however mitigate the feelings of remorse, or the pricking of conscience, that ultimately will plague Raskolnikov.

Both Olva Dune and Rodion Raskolnikov are aged twenty-three and are described as having striking dark eyes; more significantly Dune and Raskolnikov both display evidence of split personalities. Dune is indolent, contemptuous, antisocial, and can be violent and bullying, he

⁸⁷ Carl Gustav Jung, Ed. Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffé, *Letters of C. G. Jung: Volume 1, 1906-1950* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2015), p. 75.

⁸⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, trans. Thomas Common, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (Edinburgh and London, T. N. Foulis, 1909), Ch. 6, at Project Gutenberg (EBook #1998), at http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998-h/1998-h.htm#link2H_4_0011 [accessed 17/03/2020].

can also be compassionate, kindly and concerned; Raskolnikov is equally cold and distant but given to random acts of charity and concern for his fellow man. However, Raskolnikov discovers he is not the superior being he thinks he is, whereas Dune's sense of justification is rarely shaken; Carfax was a 'cad', in the vernacular of that class and time, a vernacular Walpole particularly clung to, and in Dune's opinion probably got what he deserved. Dune is not confronted with a dogged detective like Porfiry Petrovich in *Crime and Punishment* or the insightful and intuitive Rupert Cadell from *Rope*; Dune's interrogators, Bunning and Craven, are borderline neurotics and Dune casually subjects them to mental torture.

Walpole does not indicate any debt to Dostoyevsky when discussing *The Prelude to Adventure*, in the way that he suggests a reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* urged him on to write *Maradick at Forty*. The description of Dune does seem to echo that of Raskolnikov and both characters are ultimately saved or rehabilitated by the love of a woman: Raskolnikov by Sonya, and Dune by Margaret Craven. The murders the men perpetrate are quite different, and Dune never seems to be at risk of facing justice, although the influence of the deity and the redemptive effect of submissive confession plays a part in both books. The interesting question is when Walpole might have first read *Crime and Punishment*, he was certainly reading Constance Garnett's translation in 1914 while in Warsaw on his way to the Polish Front, but this was two years after the publication of *The Prelude to Adventure*.⁸⁹ There had been a publication in French in 1884 by Victor Derély, which served as a source text for further translations, and perhaps Walpole had read Frederick Wishaw's English translation from the following year.⁹⁰ Whether *Crime and Punishment* was an unacknowledged source for *The Prelude to Adventure* or not the comparison makes a potent case for intertextuality.

⁸⁹ Hart-Davis, p. 127.

⁹⁰ *Crime and Punishment* at 150: Global Contexts, Case 1: Translations, University of Toronto Libraries, 'Item 8', at <https://exhibits.library.utoronto.ca/exhibits/show/cp150/translations> [accessed 22/01/2020].

Elizabeth Steele detects a debt to Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1799) in the book, particularly in the imagery chosen to represent God. The Almighty ultimately 'appears' to Dune as a boiling cloud mass accumulating as Dune takes part in the final rugby game against Dublin, before manifesting as 'mountain clouds [...] now lit with a clear silver light so dazzling that his eyes were lowered', a voice "'My Son...My Son'" and 'a touch – very gentle and tender – on his shoulder'.⁹¹ In the confessional episodes from Book 1 of *The Prelude*, the youthful poet encounters the natural world as a sort of pantheistic spiritualised entity, whether he is being stalked by some unseen presence after taking birds from other people's traps, or hearing 'strange utterances' under an alien sky while he steals birds' eggs, as the clouds move in an uncanny way.⁹² Wordsworth's epic depicts the development of the poet's mind and imagination. Dune's apprehension of the approach of the deity is distinctly personal, but manifest through natural phenomena. Dune is no poet but his story represents the first steps on the adventure that is his spiritual journey.

Ultimately Dune confesses to Bunning and to Craven, after which he receives absolution of a sort from Craven and Margaret's mother, who it transpires murdered her abusive husband by withholding his medication. Mrs Craven is herself dying and racked by guilt for her previous actions, Dune's confession, and his belief that he did nothing wrong, offers her some form of release in return. Walpole's conviction that he must employ symbols to represent the spiritual world results in Mrs Craven being accompanied by a 'theme', the *Valse Triste* of Sibelius. The *Valse Triste* (Opus 44, No. 1) is incidental music written for Arvid Järnefelt's play *Kuolema* (*Death*) and accompanies a scene in which a dying woman summons spectres from her past in a dance, only to be interrupted by the appearance of Death

⁹¹ Walpole, *Prelude to Adventure*, p. 265.

⁹² William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1805 text ed. Ernest de Selincourt (London, Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 10, lines 324-350.

at the threshold of her room. Given the relatively obscure source it is not immediately obvious that Walpole's use of symbolism would have the desired impact on his readers.

Walpole's employment of diegesis not only presents Dune to the reader complete in the very first chapter but emphasises the not entirely credible 'split' in that character's personality later. Walpole's description of Dune's moments of inner turmoil suggests a sensibility wrestling with a moral and ethical struggle, particularly where Craven's sister Margaret is concerned. This situation is then starkly contrasted with the mimetic presentation of Dune's cruel treatment of Craven and Bunning. Dune's lack of conscience, and the stark dichotomy between his thoughts and deeds, combined with his conviction of the presence of God, seems to be a missed creative opportunity: hints of sociopathy, or a psychopathic lack of empathy, in the character of Dune that Walpole is either reluctant to explore or lacks the competence to pursue. Ironically, it is tempting to see the ambivalence of character, and psychological complexity, apparent in *The Prelude to Adventure* not as evidence of Walpole's growing maturity as a writer, but as arising out of his failure to show rather than tell; a failure to match technique to narrative. Dune's predicament, and his portrayal as an ambiguous anti-hero, results in a sanitised and pietistic version of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), with God dogging Dune instead of the Devil. Clemence Dane saw the book as a 'brilliant success' and his most rounded work to date.⁹³

Above the Dark Circus

Walpole cites *Above the Dark Circus* (1931) as his favourite of his fantasies and 'the least popular', complaining that the best things in the book have been overlooked or misunderstood.⁹⁴ The story is told in the first person by Richard Gunn, a middle-aged ex-serviceman, who has seen his fortunes deteriorate following the end of the war, to the extent

⁹³ Dane, p. 177.

⁹⁴ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, pp. xi-xii.

that as the book opens on a snowy day in December he is cold and starving, ‘a little cracked’ in consequence, and with only a half-crown to his name.⁹⁵ His situation has been exacerbated by his recent indulgence in purchasing for a guinea Lockhart’s translation of *Don Quixote* in five volumes, the first volume of which he has on his person. As noted by Walpole in his preface to *Four Fantastic Tales*, the *Don Quixote* is to prove symbolic. Gunn is torn between spending his remaining funds on the meal that would restore his health and vigour, or the haircut that would restore his self-respect and prevent him feeling himself to be ‘a dirty degenerate swine’.⁹⁶ Gunn’s dilemma is effectively conveyed by Walpole, as is his mental state within the hallucinatory environs of Piccadilly Circus with its tempting billboards and illuminated signs. Before the war Gunn was a land agent in Devon where he fell under the spell of the charismatic but potentially unstable John Osmund. Osmund is Quixotic in the sense that he is, as Anthony Close suggests of Quixote himself, the ‘universal type of idealist, the heroic altruist’ and, quoting Lockhart’s preface to his translation, the symbol of imagination at odds with reality.⁹⁷ Osmund has a girlfriend, Helen Cameron, whom Gunn inevitably falls in love with unaware that his feelings are reciprocated. Osmund, with two low-life comrades, the career-criminals Buller and Hench, is arrested for burglary at the stately home of a *nouveau riche* couple he despises, drawn into the escapade more to teach them a lesson than for personal gain. It is common knowledge among the local community that the mastermind behind the robbery is Leroy Pattison Pengelly ‘the nastiest, meanest, most abject little scoundrel born of woman’, an outsider whom it appears is also responsible for the tip-off to the police that resulted in the trio’s capture and subsequent two years in prison.⁹⁸ Having spotted Pengelly in Piccadilly Circus, Gunn is rapidly reunited with

⁹⁵ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. 6.

⁹⁶ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Anthony Close, *The Romantic Approach to ‘Don Quixote’: A Critical History of the Romantic Tradition in ‘Quixote’ Criticism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 57.

⁹⁸ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. 24.

Osmund, Buller and Hensch who following unexpected overtures from Pengelly have arranged a meeting to confront him over the past. Helen, now married to Osmund, is there too, and Gunn discovers his former feelings resurfacing.

The unrepentant and unsuspecting Pengelly misreads the situation and attempts to recruit the other men as agents and facilitators of his post-war blackmail schemes. Sickened by his proposals Osmund throttles Pengelly. The situation is then complicated by the arrival of Pengelly's brother Joseph who proves to be as loathsome as his brother Leroy. Joseph hated his brother, and actually admires Osmund for what he detects of his inherent decency, such that he not only intends to blackmail the group but wishes to be accepted by them as a comrade in expediency. The mentally fragile Hensch flees the scene and pursued by Gunn attempts to confess to murder to anyone who will listen on the streets of Piccadilly. In the finale to the tale Joseph Pengelly in attempting to emulate his nefarious brother realises he has overreached himself, and fleeing is pursued into a local theatre by Osmund, Helen, and Gunn. On the roof of the building Osmund finally seizes Pengelly, and hurls them both to their deaths.

Walpole was to express his disappointment at the reception of what he saw as an important symbolic sequence:

in the scenes when Hensch walks the streets and tries to persuade the passers-by that he is a murderer but can find nobody who will listen to him, I achieved, I thought, a real image of the apprehension that all men feel, but no critic of the book noticed this passage, nor has anyone ever commented on it to me.⁹⁹

The episode in question has a cinematic quality of tension coupled with great humour. A self-absorbed night-guide attaches himself to Gunn and Hensch, all the while extolling his broad-mindedness and imperviousness to shock, but quite oblivious as Hensch tries to confess to homicide and alert the city to an impending apocalypse. Effective as this whole sequence

⁹⁹Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. x.

is, it is questionable that it conveys the day-to-day anxiety of humanity even on a symbolic level.

E. E. Mavrogordato's review for the *TLS* suggests that the excitement of the book, as a murder story without a detective, lies in the fear of detection by the protagonists, and acknowledges the volume of *Don Quixote* as a symbol of idealism.¹⁰⁰ In fact, there seems as little chance of this murder being detected as there is of Olva Dune being apprehended for the killing of Carfax. Walpole appears less interested in the genre tropes of crime and retribution than in the psychological effects of violence upon its perpetrators and witnesses. More than this, Walpole is concerned with the response his heroes make to the quandary posed by the post-war world, when moral and ethical constraints upon personal behaviour seem diminished, after the world has witnessed wholesale slaughter on an unprecedented scale. Both Elizabeth Steele and Mavrogordato appear to relate the symbolism of the *Don Quixote* to the idealistic Gunn, but the flawed and self-deluding Osmund seems an equal candidate for the role. Marguerite Steen sees Osmund's tragedy as that 'of a romantic idealist maddened by post-war conditions which have cast out both romance and ideals'.¹⁰¹ Despite carrying a demeanour suggesting an innate superiority, and casually expressing a disgust with the modern world and his desire to discharge a revolver among the crowds, Osmund has his hopes for the human race, 'Life is superb. Human beings are magnificent – in courage, in unselfishness, in determination to do right'.¹⁰² Osmund's experience of life, for which he only blames himself, has not ultimately damaged his hopefulness; the Pengelly brothers feel

¹⁰⁰ E. E. Mavrogordato, "Above the Dark Circus", *Times Literary Supplement* (London, England), 5 Mar. 1931: 174, Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive, at <http://find.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200236444&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> [accessed 28/02/2020].

¹⁰¹ Steen, p. 110.

¹⁰² Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. 198.

differently, 'If you think the world a fine place full of noble people, I think it vile, false, rotten. Why should we quarrel about that!'.¹⁰³

For all his desperation Osmund retains his humanity, the Pengelly brothers have taken the War as licence to look out for themselves. The chaos unleashed by the Great War has presumably concentrated people's minds on the frailty of existence, and drawn them to question if moral values have any relevance in the modern world. Gunn listens as Leroy Pengelly boasts of his post-war exploits, and reflects on the ease with which one might choose evil over good:

Throw over one little scruple, one little moral hesitation, and there we are [...] The real characteristic of this post-war world of ours is not that it is especially amoral or bold or advanced, but that the reasons against our acting foolishly, badly or ruinously are so many fewer than they used to be.¹⁰⁴

Gunn also asserts, 'It is absurd to pretend that evil is not infective; it is as infective as measles or scarlet fever, and often as fascinating as a full meal to a hungry man'.¹⁰⁵ The point is of course that despite their hunger and desperation Gunn and Osmund are not infected by evil, although Osmund is arguably unhinged, but all the men in the book choose their different courses. The Pengelly brothers have opted for evil and pay the price, Hench is driven mad, although he later regains his sanity and turns to the church, Buller simply disappears, Osmund becomes an agent of retribution and sacrifices himself, while Gunn preserves himself intact and wins the girl.

Marguerite Steen suggests that there is no need to 'psychologise' over the book, or to,

probe it for the hidden meaning which, some people like to pretend, lies behind all Mr Walpole's writings. Why so lucid a writer as Hugh Walpole should be subjected to this dissection on the part of some of his admirers I find it difficult to understand.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. 199.

¹⁰⁴ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁵ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. 93.

¹⁰⁶ Steen, p. 116.

The considerable irony here is that having required Walpole's audience to accept the book as an entertainment, Steen 'begs leave to suggest that the something more is there [...] the ultra-mundanism, the midnight mood', and she goes on to say that despite the dismissal of the book in some quarters 'it is as much a child of Mr Walpole's genius, by his mistress Romance, as its forerunners [...] with whom it is linked by its shameless acknowledgement of the power of the Unseen'.¹⁰⁷

A less gushing advocate of Walpole's work was the writer and critic Jorge Luis Borges, not it has to be acknowledged a great enthusiast for the novel format, but a robust champion of popular literature and perhaps surprisingly of Walpole himself. Borges chose the 'admirable' *Above the Dark Circus* as one of the titles in *A Personal Library* (*Biblioteca personal, prólogos* 1988) a collection of favoured works for which he wrote prologues. Borges says that Walpole always knows how to tell a story, and in the manner of the sagas he does not analyse his characters but merely allows them to be seen in action. This is generous to Walpole, and perhaps true of his villains and subsidiary characters, but his central protagonists are invariably subjected to a prolonged authorial dissection. Borges identifies the 'elementary Mazdaism' behind Walpole's work, with his easily identifiable heroes and villains, and our 'mysterious' acquiescence when informed that a character is the vilest man in the world.¹⁰⁸ Borges goes on to say that Horace Walpole invented the Gothic Novel in the eighteenth-century, and in a manner that now seems ludicrous populated it with castles and ghosts, whereas in modern times Hugh Walpole has achieved the apex of that genre without recourse to the supernatural.

Above the Dark Circus seems the perfect fusion of Walpole's themes of post-war anxiety and existential crisis, against which he pitches the Quixotic idealism of his characters

¹⁰⁷ Steen, p. 117.

¹⁰⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, 'Hugh Walpole: En La Plaza Oscura', in *Biblioteca personal, prólogos* (Madrid, Alianza Editorial 1988), p. 63, at <http://23.253.41.33/wp-content/uploads/10.208.149.45/uploads/2013/03/1988-Biblioteca-Personal.-Pr%C3%B3logos-Compilaci%C3%B3n.pdf> [accessed 23/06/2017].

Osmund and Gunn. The depiction of London in the environs of Piccadilly appears more up-to-date than Walpole's usual evocation of a city clinging-on to its Edwardian atmosphere. If Walpole's claims regarding the misunderstood street-scene symbolising humanity's apprehension is unconvincing, the passive symbolism represented by the volume of *Quixote* is more effective, both Pengelly brothers observe and disregard the book oblivious to its commercial or cultural value. At the time of publication, *Above the Dark Circus* seems closest to emulating the kind of psychological-fantastic that Walpole was striving for, while still exploring his own set of themes and concerns. Given that the book was not a commercial success, one can only assume that it appeared too modern for Walpole's core audience.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the lack of moral judgement, or the amorality of the vigilantism, raised too many questions rather than providing the reassurance both his supporters and detractors suggested were expected of him as a writer. More so than in *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, the book seems to address what Clemence Dane saw as the process of rewriting personal codes of behaviour for a new age.

It seems surprising that Walpole makes so little of his use of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* in *Above the Dark Circus*, beyond claiming that it is one of the symbols he has used that the critics have failed to pick up on, as 'signs and portents of another deeply important world'.¹¹⁰ Walpole's frequent invocation of this world of the spirit, existing a mere hair's-breadth from the world of reality could literary critics just perceive it, rather evades the responsibility of effectively conjuring it. The *Quixote* obviously has a role to play in proclaiming Dunn and Osmund's romantic nature but Walpole goes further, using the book as a bond between Dunn and Osmund's wife Helen. Dunn declares of the book, 'This is the world where you and I truly are', and Helen responds, somewhat gnomically, 'If you said that about any other book

¹⁰⁹ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. xi.

¹¹⁰ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. ix.

in the world it would be literary – false. But that is sanity that Quixote world. This other is insanity, and it is because the two are mingling...They are always mingling'.¹¹¹ Once again, as with Dunbar's uncertainty about how plausible a villain Crispin is in *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, Walpole teeters on the edge of interrogating the whole nature of his literary romances. What better means than through *Don Quixote*, a book that virtually invented the concept of metafiction?¹¹² However, Walpole's acknowledgement of modern techniques stops short of deconstructing his text any further. The irony is that Cervantes, like Horace Walpole a century and a half later, and Hugh Walpole a century and a half after that, was attempting to combine an unfashionable mode of fiction with a modern perspective. During the *Siglo de Oro*, the Golden Age of Spanish Literature at the time of the Renaissance, Cervantes revived, revised, and ironised the romantic tale of chivalry. In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes offered instruction as to the dangers of escapist fiction while succeeding in ensuring its popularity. In terms of technique, John Rutherford notes that Cervantes followed the Golden Age literary principles of setting the amazing within the credible, a requirement already noted as being essential for fantastic fiction, and adapting the form of the romantic tale, even while subverting it to his own ends.¹¹³ Cervantes also approaches his task with the sense of humour and 'fun' that Walpole detects in Henry Fielding and Scott, an approach which Walpole feels has been lost in the modern realistic novel.

In *Above the Dark Circus*, *Don Quixote* is used as a symbol of romantic heroes finding themselves out-of-step with a materialistic and opportunistic world but retaining their ideals. Gunn survives his crisis, and his personal limit-experience, and wins Helen, but it is no clearer what he will do next. Elsewhere, in the epistolary ending to *Maradick at Forty*, and in

¹¹¹ Walpole, *Above the Dark Circus*, p. 172.

¹¹² Having deconstructed the elaborate layering of multiple narrators, literary jokes, and commentary that underpins the work, translator John Rutherford remarks 'self-conscious and self-referential fiction is not, as certain contemporary critics and theoreticians seem in their postmodern parochiality to believe, a twentieth-century discovery', John Rutherford, 'Introduction', Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, p. xiv.

¹¹³ Rutherford, 'Introduction', *Don Quixote*, p. viii-ix.

The Prelude to Adventure and *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair*, Walpole hints at the future for his heroes, transformed by their ordeals. Gunn is still impoverished at the end of his adventure, owing rent, and with a newly-widowed girlfriend in tow. Perhaps the abrupt conclusion to the story left those readers who craved certainty and reassurance from Hugh Walpole dissatisfied, the book may stress the importance of personal integrity in the face of adversity but it rejects the option of providing easy solutions.

Postscript to Fantastic Tales

It is interesting that Walpole's genre titles straddle the decades covering his career, especially when the posthumous publication of *The Killer and the Slain* was added to the list in 1942. Clemence Dane in 1930 identified the continuing appetite among the public for genre fiction, however critically unfashionable it might be and, with a side-swipe at the contemporary literary landscape, suggested that this was a good thing:

And it is easy to believe that the modern English novel, which is suffering so severely nowadays from specialists, highbrows, and cranks, will benefit as thoroughly from its course of Edgar Wallace and Sax Rohmer as it did a century ago from its dose of Monk Lewis, Maturin, and Mrs Radcliffe.¹¹⁴

With an obvious eye to Hugh Walpole's own formula, Dane credits Walter Scott's transformation of the Gothic novel as establishing the ingredients of the traditional English novel:

a good plot, modern or historical, a family background, a love story, adventure to taste, an air of reality, a flavour of fantasy, a happy ending – social or spiritual, some humour, and now and again a beautiful bloody shock!'.¹¹⁵

In his, admittedly selective, engagement with the emerging modern world, Walpole's fiction finds his characters confronted with moral choices, either cleaving to what they consider to be the old certainties and principles of the past or else, believing those standards to be overthrown, imagining what might be put in their place. The threats faced in Walpole's

¹¹⁴ Dane, p. 27.

¹¹⁵ Dane, p. 30.

genre novels tend to be more explicit than the abandonment of traditional values or the shaking-up of the status quo encountered in his romantic-realist novels.

In the Rising City novel *Wintersmoon* (1928), Walpole had offered a philosophical clash of opposing ideologies. With the world in a state of flux, Wildherne and Janet seek to build a new world by salvaging the good things about the past, while Rosalind and Ravage want to destroy the old world and start afresh. By the time of *Above the Dark Circus* (1931) Walpole offered a more literal clash, with the romantic idealists Gunn, and his friend Osmund, coming up against the amoral Pengelly brothers who see the uncertainty of a society in transition as an opportunity for criminal exploitation.

Latterly, Walpole embarked upon another project, which he again claims to have kept quiet for fear of mockery, the *Parables of Our Time*, in which a variety of domestic tyrants and bullies were portrayed in order to represent the rise of the demagogues Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini in European political life. The novels in this new project toyed, sometimes uncertainly, with genre tropes, and consequently had uncertain success. It is these novels, and their background, that will be considered in the next chapter.

PART TWO
Social Histories and Genre Writing
Chapter Five: Watching the Dictators

Hugh Walpole admitted that whatever he wrote ‘the macabre would keep breaking in’.¹ Consequently, when he embarked upon another themed writing project it is unsurprising that the resulting novels shared ingredients with his genre romances. With the Rising City sequence Walpole had hoped to chart the optimistic ascendancy of youth in London, creating along with his Provincial and Country novels a panoramic social history of England in the first three decades of the twentieth-century. When the aftermath of the 1914-18 War put ‘the beautiful and progressive civilisation’ he had anticipated on hold, Walpole nevertheless continued to chart the liminal period that followed the conflict.² As the century moved on into the 1930s, and against a background of international tension, Walpole attempted to engage with the times by confronting the rise of fascist dictatorships in mainland Europe, allegorically transmuting the politics of authoritarianism into the activities of a sequence of fictional domestic tyrants.

Having continually alluded to the symbolic underpinning of his genre work, and complaining of the critics’ apparent ignorance of it, Walpole did not approach his theme directly. Fearing accusations of taking himself too seriously, a failing he had himself condemned in the modern novel, he initially made no public reference to the allegorical connection linking three books, *Captain Nicholas* (1934), *A Prayer for My Son* (1936), and *The Sea Tower* (1939), as ‘Parables of the Time’.³ All three books feature leading characters attempting to wield control in domestic settings, either for reasons of egotism and pecuniary advantage, as in the case of Nicholas, or as allegorised dictators. Captain Nicholas is an

¹ Walpole, ‘Preface’, *Captain Nicholas*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1937), p. ix. Subsequent references are to this edition.

² Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

³ Steele, p. 64.

opportunistic rogue upsetting the 'little England' complacency of his sister's family, the Carlises. Colonel Fawcus in *A Prayer for My Son*, expresses his admiration for 'The Germans today, under their great leader, Hitler' and believes that given the opportunity he too could have been a great man, 'I might be where Goering is to-day had I been born a German'.⁴ Bessie Field in *The Sea Tower*, fearing that her daughter-in-law will take her beloved son away from her, edges towards violent insanity in her attempts to prevent it.

Walpole is more assured charting the response of the middle-classes to changing times, or the deprivations faced by an increasingly irrelevant aristocracy, rather than delivering a big message filtered through analogy. *A Prayer for My Son* is the most obvious 'statement' piece, with Colonel Fawcus making plain his admiration for Nazi Germany. *The Sea Tower* with its bullying matriarch Mrs Field might be one of Walpole's regular macabres. *Captain Nicholas*, subtitled 'A Modern Comedy', is the most effective of the three Parables, with its political reading subtlety conveyed within a satirical portrait of contemporary London life, and because of the seedy swagger of its titular character. The intrusion of a shadow world into the unsuspecting daylight of bourgeois complacency is something Walpole does very well, a fact he points out to his readers in the course of the novel. Captain Nicholas, discussing books with his niece and nephew, defends the novelist Somerset Ball, 'who was often roughly treated by the younger aesthetes'.⁵ Ball, as it transpires when he briefly comes, is a portrait of Walpole himself. Agreeing that Ball's novels depict 'a sham world', like fake Moorish rooms in a Turkish Bath, Nicholas argues that they are saved by 'a real sense of terror, of apprehension' because 'He [Ball] knows what it is to be frightened', unlike the cynical young aesthetes who criticise him.⁶ Introducing 'real' terror in his Turkish Bath -

⁴ Walpole, *A Prayer for My Son*, Large print limited edition (London, Macmillan, 1936), p. 191. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, p. 281.

⁶ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, pp. 281-282.

something hiding behind the lattice screen' is precisely what Walpole does when the macabre creeps into his novels.⁷

Colonel Fawcus in *A Prayer for My Son* is a more obvious demagogue than the opportunistic Nicholas, but is too bumptious and vain to be truly menacing, and his nearest literary equivalent turns out to be Bertie Wooster's nemesis Roderick Spode, leader of the Black Shorts, who would make his debut two years later in P. G. Wodehouse's *The Code of the Woosters* (1938). In *The Sea Tower* a sense of rising tension finally tips over into a melodramatic confrontation between Bessie Field and her daughter-in-law, but Walpole seems to suffer cold feet, fudging the violent climax by altering the narrative structure for the denouement.

Writing in his journal in January 1939, Walpole contended that no one would see the connection between the three novels as parables of the time, and that he wasn't about to reveal it for fear of mockery.⁸ By the time of the publication of the Cumberland Edition of *A Prayer for My Son*, added to the series in 1940 following the outbreak of war in September of the previous year, he was happy to acknowledge the character of Colonel Fawcus as signifying his hatred of Nazism, 'or indeed any power that [is] aggressive, greedy, brutal towards weaker souls, or altruistic, unselfish ideologies'.⁹ The analogous 'Nazis' in Walpole's parables, Bessie Field and Colonel Fawcus, are authoritarians who demand total obedience from their respective families. Given the way Walpole's own experience of bullying coloured his fiction, it seems fair to assume he would have agreed with Orwell's later definition when he wrote for an article in *Tribune*, 'almost any English person would accept 'bully' as a synonym for 'Fascist'. That is about as near to a definition as this much-

⁷ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, p. 282.

⁸ Hugh Walpole, quoted in Steele, p.64.

⁹ Walpole, *A Prayer for My Son*, p. vii.

abused word has come'.¹⁰ Walpole evidently sees the Nazi regime as a sort of super-bully, a global manifestation of the evil he experienced in microcosm at public school. It is easy to pick holes in his reaction. Were the ideologies menaced by Nazism characterised by unselfish altruism? And was Walpole not guilty of a sort of imperial privilege; one suspects that some recipients of colonial rule would view British actions around the world over the previous century as being defined by greed and aggression? The point is of course that Britain was now at war, and the threat that Walpole was attempting to confront went beyond the shake-up of the vaguely-defined traditional values he had tried to articulate in his fiction up to now.

Walpole assumed that by keeping the intention behind the parables a secret, the analogy with contemporary politics would be overlooked by the critics. This proved somewhat wide of the mark, as publicity for the books drew attention to it and the reviews followed suit in picking it up. The anonymous reviewer of *Captain Nicholas* for the *TLS* observes that 'There is a suggestion of an analogous "something" in this novel', and this allows the author to show 'the changing world' before Nicholas as the 'invader' is expelled 'from the country he has desolated'.¹¹ D. L. Murray reviewing *A Prayer for My Son* for the *TLS* thinks it is unfortunate that Colonel Fawcus is not allowed to remain 'a maniacal egoist' and his grandson John 'a symbol of unprotected childhood', but that the reader must be directed by the summary on the jacket to see the Colonel as representative of a threat to the modern world, and the book as a political parable rather than a modern fairy-tale about escape from

¹⁰ George Orwell, 'What is Fascism?' (London, *Tribune*, 1944), and *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Ian Angus and Sonia Brownell eds. (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), at http://orwell.ru/library/articles/As_I_Please/english/efasc [accessed 22/05/2019].

¹¹ "Captain Nicholas", *Times Literary Supplement* (London, England), issue 1703, 20 Sept. 1934, p. 634, *Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive*. Web, at <http://find.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200047189&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> [accessed 28/02/2020].

‘some medieval baron’s keep’.¹² The action of *A Prayer for My Son* is set in January of 1935, the year that saw Hitler initiate German re-armament in violation of the treaty of Versailles of 1919; by the time the book appeared in 1936 Germany had re-occupied the Rhineland. J. D. Beresford in his review of *The Sea Tower* ignores any allegorical meaning to the extent that he expects readers of his critique to infer that this book is not one of Hugh Walpole’s more serious works, but that it will afford them some respite ‘from the greater horrors of contemporary life’.¹³ Beresford’s review is perhaps indicative that a general awareness of political realities in the 1930s had rendered allegory irrelevant. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 in the USA had triggered the worldwide Great Depression, and rising unemployment and falling incomes were a fact of life for most of the following decade.¹⁴ Economic hardship contributed to the rise of Adolf Hitler’s Nazi regime in Germany, and in Britain Sir Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists attempted to exploit the economic situation, by promoting a policy of corporatism and isolationist protectionism, as well as triggering violent confrontations with opponents on British streets.¹⁵ In Beresford’s view Walpole’s Parables seem to offer little more than well-meaning escapism for readers already confronting a grim economic and political reality. Rather than the accusation of sententiousness that Walpole feared revealing his purpose would attract, the parables seemed to have been largely recognised as thinly-disguised allegories, and to have drawn nothing greater than the critical equivalent of a shrug. Closer examination of the texts in the next

¹² D. L. Murray, "Escape from Ogre's Castle", *Times Literary Supplement* (London, England), issue 1804, 29 Aug. 1936, p. 695. Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive. Web, at <http://find.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200050073&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> [accessed 09/09/2018].

¹³ J. D. Beresford, "A House Divided", *Times Literary Supplement* (London, England), issue 1939, 16 Sept. 1939: p. 537, Times Literary Supplement Historical Archive. Web. 9 July 2018, at <http://find.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/tlsh/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TLSH&userGroupName=tou&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=BasicSearchForm&docId=EX1200265224&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0> [accessed 09/09/2018].

¹⁴ John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Great Crash 1929* (London, Penguin Books, 1992).

¹⁵ M. G. Bruce, *From Peace to War: Europe 1918-1939* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1967), pp.73-88.

sections will examine how Walpole attempted to embed a response to contemporary politics within an allegorical approach.

Modern Fairy-Tales

In *A Prayer for My Son* Rose Clennel has had a child out of wedlock as her married lover cannot obtain a divorce. When her partner dies prematurely, she gives up her child John to the care of his wealthy grandfather Colonel Fawcus of Scarfe Hall in the Lake District to ensure his future, while she pursues her career with the League of Nations in Geneva. Invited to Scarfe Hall some years later she reconnects with her young son John, and eventually wins over his initially suspicious aunt, but the Colonel plans to mould the boy in his own fascistic image and effectively imprisons them all. The scenario's potential for genuine menace is outweighed by sentimentality and the sense that no one is ever really under threat, and Fawcus himself, with his mixture of bombast and joviality, proves the pettiest of dictators. Rose, John, and the aunt, eventually escape Scarfe Hall with the aid of Michael the boy's tutor, and a 'whisky' priest. Fawcus intercepts them on the flanks of Great Gable but outside of his domain finds all his power gone, and with an awareness of his own mortality lets them go. It is a measure of the trivial tone of the book that Rose having escaped her gaoler still promises to come back and visit. Referring to the collapse of Fawcus's power once Rose and her son have fled Scarfe Hall, it is notable that Walpole chose to insist that the book was a modern fairy-tale in the spirit of the Brothers Grimm.¹⁶ This emphasises the pantomime character of Fawcus's threat and rather diminishes the power of Walpole's allegory.

In *The Sea Tower* Bessie Field is obsessively possessive of her two sons, Congreve who has failed as an artist in London, and the unimaginative Joe, who runs the estate at Scarlatt in Glebeshire dominated by the ancient sea tower of the title. Joe has been working in London

¹⁶ Walpole, *A Prayer for My Son*, p. viii.

and returns with Christina, his uncannily lovely new bride, ‘the most beautiful human being Mrs Field had ever seen’.¹⁷ As Christina inadvertently inspires Congreve to once again pursue his artistic career elsewhere, and encourages her husband to mould a new life away from Scarlatt, her mother-in-law descends into jealous rage and attempts a violent revenge. Given Mrs Field’s domination of her sons it seems unlikely that she would ever have allowed them away from Scarlatt in the first place, but otherwise she is an effective maniac with all the cunning and menace that Colonel Fawcus lacks. Joe’s intransigent stupidity is matched by Christina’s saintly perfection, which not only arouses the jealousy of Mrs Field but the hatred of a housekeeper who, like Mrs Danvers in Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca* (1938), adores her employer. There is a genuine sense of mounting tension when Joe has to travel away on business and Christina is left alone at Scarlatt with the two vengeful women. Having brought the story to a pitch of melodramatic anticipation, Walpole then skips ahead with an anti-climactic penultimate chapter, a letter from Christina to Joe, written after a physically violent conclusion to the battle of wills with her mother-in-law three months earlier. Christina goes over the events of the night in question, indulges in a disquisition on the psychology of lesbianism and basically reassures the reader that everyone is safe and well. The final chapter then goes back to the fateful night and recounts events in real time, an attack on Christina with a red-hot poker and a sweaty naked wrestling match between her and the housekeeper. Playing with the timeline in this way, while suggesting a self-consciously ‘modern’ dislocation of narrative chronology, actually serves to undermine the rising note of melodramatic tension achieved as the story works towards its denouement. There is no reason to assume that the alienating effect of this decision was intended, but alienating it is. The happy-ever-after intrusion of the penultimate chapter emphasises that this story too has a

¹⁷ Walpole, *The Sea Tower* (London: Macmillan, 1939), p. 70.

fairy-tale quality like its predecessor, with a beautiful bride, a handsome if stupid prince, and a wicked mother-in-law in place of the usual stepmother.

The use of a classic Walpole plot device, the disruptive intruder, draws attention to similarities between these novels and previous outings, and a strong case can be made for Walpole having recycled plot elements. In *A Prayer for My Son*, Rose has to reconnect with her estranged child, as Harry Trojan must do with his in *The Wooden Horse* (1909). Harry wins back his grown-up son Robin when he helps extricate him from a breach of promise case. Rose and her son John bond, when she rescues him after he gets lost in the morning mist on the flanks of Skiddaw fell, during a misjudged solo hike from Scarfe Hall to London via Carlisle. In both of these books the parents also face the opposition of their children's possessive aunts. *The Green Mirror* (1918) has the intruder, Phillip Mark, attempting to spirit fiancé Katherine away from her family, against the will of her mother Mrs Trenchard. *The Sea Tower* switches the gender relationship, so that new wife Christina wishes a life away with her dull husband Joe, and is ultimately violently opposed by Joe's domineering mother Mrs Field. Both Mrs Trenchard and Mrs Field have feckless distracted husbands, Mr Trenchard is endlessly researching the Lake Poets, Mr Field has a substantial library, these husbands and fathers' complacent disinterest in their own families, until a crisis arises, recalls the attitude of Mr Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).

Given Walpole's apparent caution in acknowledging the unifying theme behind the books, and the fact that reviewers picked up on the hinted allegory anyway, and were dismissive, it is hard to see what the exercise was intended to achieve. *The Sea Tower* could be any one of Walpole's genre-straddling macabres, while the more explicitly political *A Prayer for My Son* suffers from the presentation of its villain. There are hints that Walpole wishes to make Colonel Fawcus a more threateningly complex presence than he is. The Colonel is narcissistic; still proud of his physique as he approaches his seventieth birthday, he exercises

naked, and conducts surreptitious affairs with his housemaids while making sexual overtures to Rose. Fawcus also praises the regime of ancient Sparta, administers corporal punishment to John his grandson, and inspires both love and fear, reducing the boy to tears through his bizarre training methods conducted behind closed doors. Despite these hints at some psychosexual basis underpinning the Colonel's embrace of fascism, Walpole stops short of fully exploring it. The final image of Fawcus submitting to the rigours of advancing years, following his pursuit of the fugitives, rather nullifies his threat, and the supposed indictment of authoritarianism and dictatorship.

Given that both *A Prayer for My Son* and *The Sea Tower* play out in the enclosed bubble environments within the 'real' world that Walpole creates for his genre fiction, their relationship to actual events, the contemporary reality of fascism, seems equally tangential. Walpole does however provide the long-term reader, who may recall the hopes of the Rising City generation, with an update on the attitudes of what might be termed that generation's younger siblings. *A Prayer for My Son* is set in 1935, Rose is thirty, and 'of a generation brought up to regard simple kindness as extremely suspect', she grants those 'accused of the worst crimes in the human calendar [...] the friendly protection of Freudian analysis', finds the works of John Galsworthy, James Barrie, and A. A. Milne 'pernicious', and assumes anyone with a reputation for kindness 'must also be false and hypocritical'.¹⁸ And yet Rose finds herself surrendering to the kind welcome offered to her by Colonel Fawcus, which does prove to have an ulterior motive. Walpole seems to be condemning his heroine both for her youthful cynicism and her naivety. As for the tutor Michael, who is younger still at twenty-three, the previous World War means nothing to him and his contemporaries, not only because he was only six on Armistice Day, but because his whole life has been lived against a backdrop of international conflict. Walpole makes specific reference to the murder of the

¹⁸ Walpole, *A Prayer for My Son*, p.17.

Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss by Nazi agents in 1934, and the plebiscite in the French and British-occupied Saar Basin of Germany, when the German majority population voted to re-join the Reich. Walpole writes that Michael's generation's only cultural representatives were the poets W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Cecil Day-Lewis.

But there were thousands of young men like Michael, who out of an extraordinary welter of machinery, speed, half-baked science, complete sexual frankness, poverty, cynicism and unemployment were achieving a new calm, not of indifference, but of a kind of philosophical humorous fortitude. The world was indeed a ludicrous mess, but it was a new world, as new as the early Elizabethan one had been. It offered, no doubt, every kind of parallel to that other splendid epoch – the speed, the machinery and the unemployment were all necessary parts of it. What a time to be alive in!¹⁹

Walpole says that Michael has 'no illusions [...]; no sentimentality, no unbalanced idealism' but under this 'superficial colouring' he was like all young men ever, 'idealistic, sentimental, patriotic'.²⁰ In Michael's case he reveals his true romantic nature in his positive response to the landscape of the Lake District. Walpole, with a signature optimism, suggests that despite the younger generation's superficial appearance of cynicism, they are essentially good sorts who will probably come through in a crisis. It is interesting that he makes an analogy with the England of early Elizabethan times, when a largely isolated nation also faced threats from Europe, possibly to reassure his readership that the country had weathered such storms before and would prove to be in safe hands.

As Walpole progressed with his *Parables of the Time*, the gradually increasing level of threat within the plotting reflected the deteriorating international situation. In *Captain Nicholas* an intruder merely shakes up his complacent relations, in *A Prayer for My Son* a would-be demagogue imprisons his family, in *The Sea Tower* a jealous mother is driven to violence against a new family member. Turning aside from Walpole's use of political allegory, and considering the novel with which he began the project, it is *Captain Nicholas*

¹⁹ Walpole, *A Prayer for My Son*, p. 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

that proves the more intriguing contender within the Parables. The book's rather straightforward warning about British complacency is of secondary interest to Walpole's abiding text, that being the destructive nature of modern disillusionment and selfish opportunism.

Modern Comedy

In *Captain Nicholas*, the eponymous Captain, lately returned to London from Italy, invites himself to live in his sister Fanny Carlisle's family home. The Carlises, Fanny, her husband Charles, sister Grace, brother Matthew, children Nell, Romney, and Edward, and Charles' mother, are on the surface happy and stable to the point of complacency. In fact, Charles has had an affair while Fanny was away on a cruise, Fanny's mother-in-law dislikes her, delusional Grace writes herself letters purporting to be from a male admirer, Nell is in a relationship with a married man, Romney is confused about his feelings for his best friend Harry, and Matthew's religious faith and almost saintly piety masks an abiding hatred for his brother. Nicholas inveigles his way into the family confidence and begins to take over, his capacity for mischief eventually hardening into a malicious determination to disrupt what he sees as their naïve complacency.

If not actually on the run from Italy, where his free-loading and success at cards may have got him into trouble, then Nicholas is certainly destitute and looking for somewhere to lie low for a time. He is accompanied by his worldly-wise twelve-year old daughter Lizzie and dogged by the doting Abel, a partner in crime who knows too much about him and with whom he shares a love-hate relationship. Elizabeth Steele says that Nicholas's military rank, his intellectualism, and Abel, his 'Italian bodyguard', mark him out as representative of 'the original Fascisti'.²¹ While Nicholas, as the classic Walpole disruptive intruder, may be

²¹ Steele, p. 64.

analogised as a 'foreign' threat to the smug little England of the Carlisle family home, Steele both misremembers the text and underestimates the full import of the intellectual strand to Nicholas's character. Abel is not Italian; he is described as Jamaican and of mixed-race. Nor is Abel Nicholas's bodyguard. Their relationship is a complex one revolving around Abel's 'love' for Nicholas, his parasitic dependence upon him, his threatened ability to blackmail him if need be, and his unwholesome interest in Nicholas's daughter Lizzie. Steele also claims that the American Ezra Pound is Nicholas's favourite poet, and that given Pound's political leanings this also ties the Captain to the Fascist cause. In fact, although Nicholas is at one point shown reading Pound's *Cantos* (1925), evidence of his 'modern' tendency, the only English poet he admires is the left-leaning W. H. Auden, cited as the writer of *The Orators* (1932), a poem-cycle which specifically reflects Walpole's own theme, the troubled state of England in the 1930s. In a telling section Nicholas contemplates his cultural 'enthusiasms' which, when shared with a like-minded individual, allow him to drop his mask of cynicism and ignore his criminal pursuits: 'Christopher Marlowe, Proust, Donne, Calverley, Peacock, Joyce's *Ulysses*, Webster and Tourneur, Spengler and Amanda McKittrick Ros'.²² Eliot's collected *Elizabethan Essays* had appeared in 1934, and Nicholas's enthusiasm for the Elizabethans and the Jacobean echoes the rediscovery of those writers as an antidote to Romanticism. His approval of *Ulysses* also marks him as 'modern'. Spengler, whose *The Decline of the West* (1918) foresaw the limits of civilisation and the inevitable rise of militaristic dictatorships is also referenced. Nicholas's liking for Amanda McKittrick Ros seems a playful inclusion, although Aldous Huxley had detected in her writing some compatibility with Elizabethan mannerism.²³

²² Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, p.50.

²³ Aldous Huxley, 'Euphues Redivivus' in *On the Margin* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1971), pp. 134-138.

Nicholas then is representative of much more than an allegorised foreign Fascist threat to the Carlisle's complacent little England. He is modern and espouses modern mores, and a rejection of things his family believes in that he claims no longer exist, such as 'patriotism, the family, religion'.²⁴ Nicholas is one of the modern 'destroyers' that Walpole saw as posing a threat to traditional values, both social and cultural. What Nicholas would consider to be his pragmatic realism is indicative of the same sort of ruthless opportunism displayed by the Pengelly brothers in *Above the Dark Circus*. During a disastrous dinner-party at the Carlisles when a guest anxiously foresees the end of civilisation, Nicholas muses to himself, "We are going back to lawlessness again. And a good thing too. There'll be pickings for everybody. What a dull old age I would have had thirty years ago, but now – ".²⁵ The linked novels of the Parables of the Time present more obvious examples of despotism in the characters of Colonel Fawcus in *A Prayer for My Son*, and the matriarch Bessie Field in *The Sea Tower*, but, in drawing the character of Nicholas, Walpole lays charges against the pessimism that he sees rife in modern English society, and its consequences. Walpole intended the book to be about Fanny, her devotion to her spouse and her 'maternal fidelity', but he concedes that his love of the macabre allowed the character of Nicholas to threaten to dominate the book.²⁶ Nicholas as anti-hero fulfils Pechorin's role in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* (1840), 'a portrait composed of all the vices of our generation in the fullness of their development'.²⁷

Captain Nicholas is subtitled 'A Modern Comedy' and there is a strain of satire running through it and much 'local colour' too. Hector, Nell Carlisle's married lover, is a modern poet working on the 'Wilderness', an epic of Miltonian proportions perhaps modelled on Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), in which nature reclaims the city of London and God is

²⁴ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, p. 185.

²⁵ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, pp. 137-138.

²⁶ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, p. ix.

²⁷ Mikhail Lermontov, trans. Vladimir Nabokov, *A Hero of Our Time* (Woodstock, Ardis, 2002), p. 2.

presented playing bowls against St. Peter. When not writing his magnum opus, Hector earns a precarious living appearing in a surrealistic play. Nicholas advises Romney to read Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) to make sense of his confused feelings, and the unfortunate boy subsequently uses Birkin and Gerald's wrestling match to try to describe to his down-to-earth friend Harry how he sees their relationship, with inevitably disastrous results. Nicholas also attempts to explain to Charles, who has found Lawrence 'altogether disgusting', the workings of the subconscious:

“You're not really thinking what you *think* you're thinking. You're not really doing what you *think* you're doing. You work in layers. In the old days writers dealt only with the top layer. Now they go down and down – ever so low”.²⁸

Walpole himself appears in the flimsy guise of the novelist Somerset Ball, who 'robust, red-faced, had a large shining forehead and precisely the correct manner', and chairs a meeting on Child Cruelty, fulfilling the role of reassuring the middle-classes that Middleton Murry had ascribed to him, by giving the impression, 'All the same, so long as I'm here, things can't be so dreadfully bad'.²⁹

Fanny eventually challenges the family to choose between Nicholas and herself, and the Captain's machinations are exposed. He has borrowed money from Charles which he has no intention of repaying, he has sold family heirlooms, and he has surreptitiously allowed Fanny to discover evidence of her husband's sexual indiscretion. Unrepentant, Nicholas points out that 'the world has changed', the family were already up to their own little games before he arrived and he has in fact done them 'a good turn' by opening their eyes.³⁰

Steele suggests *Captain Nicholas* fails in not taking Fascism seriously, and that its reduction of 'important political issues to the dimensions of soap opera', was dictated by the popular novelist's awareness of the conventionality of his audience, and that later books were a more

²⁸ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, pp. 404-405.

²⁹ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, pp. 293-294, Walpole's frequent cameos in his own novels are usually accompanied by mocking descriptions of his appearance and demeanour.

³⁰ Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, pp. 459-461.

effective response.³¹ Taking issue with this reading, Walpole may just as easily be accused of a lack of seriousness by casting those later books, *A Prayer for My Son* and *The Sea Tower*, as allegorical macabres. The former with its bombastic villain, and the latter's simmering melodrama, both take place in fairy-tale vacuums, the enclosed worlds-within-the-real-world of his genre fiction. Captain Nicholas, swaggering through modern London, dismissing old values, while robbing his gullible relatives and consorting with a criminal underclass, is perhaps a more accurate manifestation of an amoral and nihilistic *Übermensch*, even within the 'modern comedy' of Walpole's novel's description. Walpole's analogising of dictatorship through the characters of the antagonists of his Parables, hardly addresses the reality of Naziism or Fascism, or Walpole's stated hatred of such. Nicholas is a manipulative crook. Fawcus a narcissistic bully, and Bessie Field a domineering matriarch. If Walpole's intention was to lard his narrative with a message, which seems the case, then only *Captain Nicholas* with its warning against complacency seems to address this.

To the timekept city

Complaining to Nicholas about modern literature, his brother-in-law Charles asks 'are there never going to be any jolly books again?'³² Hugh Walpole was to interrupt writing *The Sea Tower* in order to produce one. After delivering a lecture in Manchester, he was told by his host, the bookseller J. D. Hughes, that what people hungered for was "a happy book by an intelligent writer".³³ That remark is obviously open to a variety of readings, one of which could be that intelligent writers were not, at that time, inclined to write happy books.

Walpole may have taken it as confirmation that the modern novel had lost its way in its

³¹ Steele, p. 66.

³² Walpole, *Captain Nicholas*, p. 406.

³³ Hugh Walpole, journal entry quoted in Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p.372. Whatever Walpole's recollection of its origins, the premise behind the resulting book, *The Joyful Delaneys* (1938), seems to owe something to that of the poet Edward Thomas's only novel *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans* (1913).

pursuit of art, abandoning its jollity and humanity in the process, as he had claimed in his Preface to *The Thirteen Travellers* (1921).

Walpole responded to the plea, taking the plot of his cynical, ironic, satirical fable, *Captain Nicholas*, and rewriting it. In *Captain Nicholas* the Carlisles are caught out when their misdemeanours and uncertainties expose their happy family life as something of a complacent sham. The psychological uncertainties experienced by the Carlisle family, the fuel for the Captain's power over them, are replaced in *The Joyful Delaneys* (1938), by the external threats confronting a new family, Meg and Fred Delaney and their children, son 'Bullock', and daughter Kitty. Both father and son are out of work, although Bullock writes jokes for *Punch*, and the family rent out rooms in their large old home in London's Shepherd Market, the only building of its era not to have been converted into flats. The symbolism is clear, the house itself is clinging on to tradition and a way of life being swept aside by modernity. Financial pressure and premonitions of war are of more import to the Delaneys than sexual indiscretion or sexual confusion, and despite all they remain a close, mutually supportive, happy family. The Delaney children, Bullock and Kitty, are down-to-earth and well-adjusted, Meg and Fred Delaney seem to have an open marriage, during the course of the book they both contemplate embarking on sexual affairs but independently decide not to risk their relationship. Bullock Delaney is fiercely unsophisticated with none of Romney Carlisle's sexual confusion. Walpole continues to take satirical swipes at modern culture when Kitty Delaney, like Nell Carlisle, takes up with a young man with artistic pretensions. Where Nell's Hector was a budding poet and an actor in a surrealist play, Kitty's Alton Foster has written a modern drama making use of 'Cinema technique' and which opens with a girl in an attic feeding a 'symbolic' mouse.³⁴

³⁴ Walpole, *The Joyful Delaneys*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1938), p. 149. Subsequent references are to this edition.

The Delaneys are in danger of losing their home, as the tenants to whom they let rooms either depart or can no longer afford the rent. There are echoes of both the *Rising City* and the *Parables of the Time*, and some returning characters from earlier books. The ageing Felix Brun meets Fred Delaney's disreputable brother Larry at a party given by the new Duchess of Wrexe. Larry declares that modern Britain is 'rough, hazardous, cynical like all new worlds' and not 'young, idealistic, full of hope' as Brun would have it, but 'Fierce, vulgar, scornful' like 'new worlds' of the past.³⁵ Here is an echo of the passage in *A Prayer for My Son*, when Michael's world is described optimistically, while conveniently overlooking the unfortunate disadvantages faced by others.³⁶ Subsequently, that vision has been coarsened by people like Larry, who is a sort of opportunistic go-between, acquiring things for people, that they may not realise they want, from people, who have no choice but to give them up. Larry is not as criminally inclined as Captain Nicholas but has the same amoral attitude. Walpole's *Rising City* appears to have foundered on the reefs of self-interest and materialism. The epigraph for *The Joyful Delaneys* is from Eliot's *The Rock* (1934) and, just as mention of Auden's *The Orators* in *Captain Nicholas* hinted at Walpole's theme in that book, the reference to Eliot's verse-play fulfils the same purpose here. Eliot mourned a failure to maintain the spiritual foundations of society, as people turned away from God in pursuit of the trappings of consumerism. Unemployment, the sense of wasted potential, opportunism versus altruism, commerce versus community, are all touched upon in Eliot's text, as they are in *The Joyful Delaneys*; there is also a premonition of war.³⁷ In fact, in 1938 when *The Joyful Delaneys* appeared, war appeared to have been averted. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returned from Munich with a resolution on resolving disputes, signed by himself and German

³⁵ Walpole, *The Joyful Delaneys*, pp. 292-296.

³⁶ Walpole, *A Prayer for My Son*, p. 26.

³⁷ T. S. Eliot, 'Choruses From 'The Rock'', 1934', in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London, Book Club Associates, 1977), pp. 145-167.

Chancellor Hitler, and announcing 'Peace for our Time', in a speech subsequently to become notorious as war was declared the following year.

The book's appearance, coincident with an apparent easing of international tension, must have seemed serendipitous, given its 'happy' brief. Fred and Meg Delaney choose each other over the transient pleasures of sexual flings elsewhere, Kitty ditches her unsuitable boyfriend, and Bullock extricates Lizzie Coventry from her reduced and financially desperate father Captain Nicholas, placing her within the normal wholesome family bosom of her relatives the Carlises. The fact that the Captain has gone to seed, used up most of his roguish charm, and finally relinquishes his hold on the daughter he claims to love above all else, is the final indictment of the modern cynicism he stands for. Finally, an 'Absalom Jay' type character is rescued from penury and an abusive landlord, and installed as a tenant in the Delaney home, as is a rich old art collector and his pictures. The future of the family's threatened residence, and all the tradition, continuity, and sense of community that it represents, is thus secured. Walpole's flirtation with bearding dictators resumed with his next book *The Sea Tower*, dismissed by J. D. Beresford as a diversion from contemporary horrors. *The Joyful Delaneys*, which actually addresses unemployment, debt, and the possibility of war, only to provide a happy-ever-after ending, while enjoyable in itself, in fulfilling its brief seems even more removed from reality.

Meeting the Dictators

Outside of his rather muted, or superficial, fictional response to the threat of dictatorship in his *Parables of the Time*, Walpole had the opportunity to engage with its reality as the 1930s came to an end. In February of 1939 he was asked by the Hearst News Syndicate to travel to Rome to report on the burial of Pope Pius XI. He was then asked to stay on in the city to report on the election of the new Pontiff. The resulting experience was subsequently

published as the memoir *Roman Fountain* (1940), comprising what Rupert Hart-Davis describes as ‘vivid reporting of the Papal ceremonies and Roman scenes with passages of garbled autobiography and others of pure fiction’.³⁸ Within this melange Walpole describes his personal encounters with the dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.

Steele points out that Walpole referred to Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin as the “‘Tiger Dictators’”, the tiger being used by Walpole to represent an ‘unpredictable force’, the id as described in *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, and potential threats in general.³⁹ It is notable that the term crops up in *Roman Fountain* in a context where Walpole recalls feeling far more destabilised than in his confrontation with the two leaders of the Rome-Berlin Axis. He describes being afraid of only four people in his life, the Italian who cleaned his hotel room on his first visit to Rome in 1909, a friend who causes him to doubt his own sincerity, and the writers Katherine Mansfield and Rebecca West.⁴⁰ He recounts that when contributing to *Rhythm* in 1910, following his return from his first visit to Rome, he attended meetings with the editors John Middleton Murry and Mansfield who were known as ‘The Tigers’.⁴¹ Along with this pair were D. H. Lawrence, the artist Henri Gaudier-Breszka, J. D. Beresford, and Gilbert Canaan, ‘the Highbrows of that day’.⁴² Wishing to be Highbrow himself Walpole would tie himself in knots attempting clever remarks whenever Mansfield spoke to him, embarrassing himself in the process. No doubt Walpole’s memories of his insecurity and apprehension are genuine but he has a poor grasp of chronology and never lets the facts get in the way of a good story. The first trip to Rome in 1909, in which he is shown the titular roman fountain, is a complete invention, he did travel abroad in that year but Rome was not

³⁸ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 401.

³⁹ Steele, p.144

⁴⁰ Walpole, *Roman Fountain* (London, Macmillan, 1940), pp. 12-14. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴¹ Walpole, *Roman Fountain*, p. 13.

⁴² Walpole, *Roman Fountain*, pp. 12-14.

on the itinerary.⁴³ In his later and genuine visit to the city in 1939, as recounted in *Roman Fountain*, a search, which does not take place, for the monument from the earlier fictitious visit, which does not exist, comes to symbolise his own search for self, his own reality. In the invented trip of 1909, he is taken to see the monument in question by a down-at-heel English ex-patriate, Mister Montmorency, again fictitious. This character attempts to sell the young Walpole dirty postcards, tries to borrow money off him, and the whole sequence generally brings to mind elements of Christopher Isherwood's *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935). Walpole was apparently delighted when people told him that the search for the symbolic fountain and the character of Montmorency were the best things in *Roman Fountain*, given that he had invented them.⁴⁴ As for Walpole's recollection of squirming at the meetings of *Rhythm* in 1910, after his fictitious return from his fictitious Roman visit, the magazine didn't appear before 1911 and Murry wouldn't approach Walpole to be a contributor until after the publication of *Fortitude* in 1913.⁴⁵ Hart-Davis suggests that 'Despite its mixture of inaccurate fact and symbolic invention' *Roman Fountain* 'is of all his books the most revealing of himself and his character', perhaps that should read 'because of'.⁴⁶

As for the dictators, Walpole recalls meeting Hitler in 1924 at the annual Wagner festival at Bayreuth when they were both guests of Winifred Wagner.⁴⁷ This meeting must actually have been in 1925, as Hitler was only released from Landsberg prison in December of the previous year, after the failed Beer Hall Putsch of 1923. Hart-Davis notes that the encounter only merited a passing reference in Walpole's diary at the time, before being expanded for *Roman Fountain* and an article, 'Why didn't I put Poison in his Coffee?', covering the same ground for *John o' London's Weekly* in October 1940. Hart-Davis asserts the essential

⁴³ Hart-Davis, p. 76.

⁴⁴ Hart-Davis, p. 401.

⁴⁵ Hart-Davis, p. 98.

⁴⁶ Hart-Davis, p. 401

⁴⁷ Walpole, *Roman Fountain*, p.122.

factual basis of the episode while noting the account's proliferation of inaccuracies.⁴⁸ *Roman Fountain* was completed in August 1939, just before the outbreak of war the following month, and yet Hitler receives no more than a couple of paragraphs. In the book, during Pope Pius's funeral service, Walpole finds himself thinking about his earlier meeting with the future Führer. He recalls Hitler crying while listening to Wagner at Bayreuth, and his obvious sincerity in his passion for Germany. At the time, Walpole liked him, and yet thought him 'tenth-rate', emotionally unstable, and likely to be assassinated or executed.⁴⁹ Walpole sees Mussolini at the memorial service for Pope Pius XI and experiences friendly and protective feelings toward him, in view of the possible threat of his assassination, while finding him both ordinary and suspecting that he has become unimportant.⁵⁰ Given his stated hatred for Nazism and the bullying regimes that he claimed inspired the novels of the Parables of the Time, it seems curious that when confronted by the manifestations of the ideology, in the persons of these two individuals, Walpole allowed himself to be so equable. A possible explanation is that he detected, or attributed, the same banality in this pair that he finds in the characters of the bullies, opportunists, self-seekers and petty criminals within his books. In *Above the Dark Circus* (1931) Walpole wrote about the fascination of evil, and its infective nature, but in *Roman Fountain* Hitler is presented as a pathetic creation for all his ambition, and Mussolini comes across as a weary civil servant.

The Killer and the Slain

Walpole's last completed novel, *The Killer and the Slain*, posthumously published in 1942, returned to the concept of the Parables of the Time. It is his most effective genre novel in that he finally succeeds in marrying traditional narrative with a modern psychological

⁴⁸ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, pp. 263-264 including note.

⁴⁹ Walpole, *Roman Fountain*, p. 123.

⁵⁰ Walpole, *Roman Fountain*, pp. 154-155.

approach. *The Killer and the Slain* takes the form of a written account by John Ozias Talbot, a sensitive romantic soul of unassuming and prudish habits, devoted to his mother, somewhat repulsed by his father and, in the terms of the book's central conceit, in possession of a 'feminine' nature. Talbot runs an antique business in Seaborne in Glebeshire but his real enthusiasm is as a novelist. Talbot was tormented at school by James Oliphant Tunstall, who teased him mercilessly while professing affection for him and claiming they were the closest of friends. Talbot and Tunstall lose touch while the latter forges a successful career in London as a portraitist, but to Talbot's dismay Tunstall returns to settle in Seaborne, with his wife Leila, when his career stalls. Tunstall is everything Talbot hates, a hirsute fleshy masculine man fond of drink and women who enjoys an easy familiarity with his fellows. Once embedded back in the Seaborne community Tunstall resumes his teasing domination of Talbot, inflicting upon him the physical contact that Talbot hates, declaring him to be his oldest friend and insisting on the existence of a deeper bond, "I'm the other side of yourself, Jacko, the side you're not very proud of".⁵¹ Tunstall embarks upon an affair with Bella a local woman, and insists upon sharing every intimate detail with his prudish victim. Eventually, driven to distraction, jealous of Tunstall's flirtatious intimacy with Eve his wife and the way their young son responds to the other man, Talbot hatches a plan to kill his enemy, which he does, pushing him off a cliff one night as Tunstall is on his way to an assignation with Bella.

Talbot's killing of Tunstall has an immediate impact, he goes home to Eve and asserts himself in the bedroom and begins to behave with more confidence in general. But Talbot feels himself haunted by Tunstall's presence, and finds himself in possession of facts which only the murdered man could have known. Talbot begins a process of transformation, physically putting on weight and becoming more hirsute, while adopting the other man's

⁵¹ Walpole, *The Killer and the Slain*, p.29.

bluff self-confident personality. Meanwhile, the sense of being haunted increases and Talbot fears he is being possessed, something which Walpole expresses in sexualised terms:

I was little John Talbot, just as I used to be. But John Talbot who had been ravished, assaulted, invaded, possessed. Something – someone? – had been within me that night. Yes – had dwelt within me and been master of me.⁵²

The initial stage of transformation may be designated as Talbot/Tunstall, with Talbot ascendant but aware of an external mocking presence, and fearful of penetration and possession by the other's personality. The second stage of transformation follows that possession, as Tunstall/Talbot, with the dead man's personality in control, expresses contempt for Talbot's previous life, regrets his act of homicide, and becomes increasingly paranoid and violent in reaction to society's disapproval. Talbot's personality meanwhile has become subsumed, a buried memory, now only occasionally manifested as a disembodied weeping.

Tunstall/Talbot becomes vocal in his support of Hitler and Nazi Germany bringing the disapproval of the community of Seaborne which in turn fuels his paranoia and sociopathy. Increasingly violent Tunstall/Talbot sets out to murder Leila's sensitive brother, whom he appears to identify with Talbot himself, presumably in order to purge any vestiges of the other man from his psyche. Prior to his murder Tunstall was a sensualist whose only interests were drink, women, and making money, so Tunstall/Talbot's conversion to the Fascist cause indicates a further layer of possession beyond that of Talbot by the spirit of his tormentor. Leila Tunstall believes her husband was already wrestling with such a possession before his death, and describes the Nazi hierarchy as mere vessels for a much greater evil.⁵³ Towards the end of the book Tunstall/Talbot declares he is 'obeying the will of my Master who tells

⁵² Walpole, *The Killer and the Slain*, p. 94.

⁵³ Walpole, *The Killer and the Slain*, p. 151.

me what I must do' the inference being that he is possessed by the Devil.⁵⁴ Now in the midst of a World War, the banality that Walpole previously suggested surrounded Hitler and Mussolini, as recounted in *Roman Fountain*, has become transformed, and the Nazis are recast as agents of diabolic evil.

Just as Talbot becomes his opposite, Walpole turns his usual formula on its head. In his work, admirable male characters are powerfully-built and down-to-earth bordering on the naïve, and are juxtaposed with their slighter, artistically-inclined, male friends and relations. The central male friendship in this novel is one-sided and perverse, based on domination rather than mutual support, and Tunstall, as representative of Walpole's powerfully-built ideal male, is gone-to-seed and bordering on the corpulent. Relationships between men and women in Walpole's novels are either troubled, or romanticised, with 'ideal' women pursued only to be given up, as in *The Young Enchanted* (1921) and *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925). In *The Killer and the Slain*, Eve is Talbot's perfect woman made flesh, with an expression 'of one of the Burne-Jones angels', she even favours the pre-Raphaelites as her specialisation in their antique shop.⁵⁵ However, there is the suggestion that Eve is not a virgin on her and Talbot's wedding-night, and she is explicit in revealing that men like Tunstall are the kind of man she is attracted to. Another example of Walpole subverting his own formula concerns the epiphanic moment, whereby his protagonists are transformed for the better by a crisis, in *The Killer and the Slain* this comes when Talbot murders Tunstall but is then transformed into what he previously despised.

The most pertinent comment upon *The Killer and the Slain* comes within the book itself, when Tunstall having seen some of the youthful Talbot's literary efforts advises him to spice them up, "Later on, when you're selling things to the papers, put in bits about girls' legs and

⁵⁴ Walpole, *The Killer and the Slain*, p. 167.

⁵⁵ Walpole, *The Killer and the Slain*, p. 18.

that sort of thing. That's what sells. After all, it is what men are always thinking of – 'a bit of skirt'".⁵⁶ The book is Walpole taking Tunstall's advice, spicing up his efforts, fully-embracing the popular genre novel with its ingredients of sex and violence, and providing an effective psychological fantasy in the process.

Despite having toyed allegorically with dictatorship in his fiction in the run-up to the outbreak of war, even Walpole's *The Killer and the Slain*, written against a background of invasion fears and the aerial bombardment of the blitz, did not actively engage with the conflict. A short story collection, *The City Under Fire*, was planned to be a companion-piece to *The Thirteen Travellers* (1921), imagining characters from other of his books and their experiences of the bombing of London, but Walpole's main endeavour proved to be an historical novel. Walpole had already revived his interest in the Herries family, by imagining their Elizabethan antecedents in *The Bright Pavilions* (1940), now with *Katherine Christian* (incomplete but posthumously published 1944) he traced them through the period of the Civil War. It is tempting to see this retreat into the past as just that, a means to avoid the realities of war, except both books deal with the political and religious conflicts that marked their periods. Walpole conceived his Herries books as a social history of England, they were after all a rurally-set companion sequence to the Rising City and the provincial novels of Polchester. The next chapter will consider Walpole's historical novels both in context and in detail.

⁵⁶ Walpole, *The Killer and the Slain*, p. 11.

PART THREE
Into the Past, Historical Fiction, Literary Scandal and Pageantry
Chapter Six: Pining for the Lakes

It is a bizarre footnote to the arc of obscurity described within the career of Hugh Walpole that one of his books should be referenced in the context of a television show acknowledged to be so innovative that its title has infiltrated the English lexicon; it is also somewhat typical that when the book is mentioned Hugh's authorship is confused with that of his ancestor Horace. In 'Salad Days', episode 33 of the BBC comedy series *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969-1974), broadcast in 1972, there is a sketch involving the failed attempts of a customer trying to buy cheese from a cheese shop which does not in fact stock any of that product. Prior to his ultimately frustrating shopping trip the customer says he has been at the public library 'skimming' through a copy of *Rogue Herries* (1930) which he mistakenly attributes to Horace Walpole.¹

Whether or not *The Radio Times* of the following week was deluged with letters pointing out the error is rather tangential to the scope of this study, the durability of Hugh Walpole's reputation after his death is not. In the same year as *Monty Python* confused the Walpoles, Elizabeth Steele acknowledged the issue in her study of the author, comparing a journalistic headline from the New York *Sun* in 1919 introducing the young novelist to American audiences, 'Who's Hugh?', and his subsequent ubiquity during the 20s and 30s, to her own day:

Yet after his death during World War II, Walpole's name suddenly dropped from sight. His literary repute suffered, seemingly, from the lack of his personal presence; and the eclipse has deepened with the passing years until "Who's Hugh?" is again a legitimate query. When today's young teachers of literature confuse Sir Hugh

¹ Luke Dempsey ed., *Monty Python's Flying Circus: Complete and Annotated – All the Bits* (New York, Black Dog & Leventhal, 2012), pp. 627-634. In this annotated edition of the scripts the editor correctly identifies Hugh Walpole as the author of *Rogue Herries* and supplies a potted biography.

Walpole (1884-1941) with his ancestral cousin Horace Walpole (1717-97), fourth Earl of Orford, the error is almost understandable.²

Walpole's 'disappearance' is unlikely to have been as spectacular as this comment suggests.

In 1963 Frank Swinnerton wrote:

Reputations drop more quickly now than ever before, and the romantic or as I should like to say really creative novelist is out of fashion. [...] To the coteries, his is a faded name. In Public Libraries, on the other hand, which are places where books are nursed for indefinite survival, Walpole's are still eagerly read.³

With an eye to posterity, in the decade preceding his untimely death, Walpole attempted to establish his reputation with an ambitious foray into the historical fiction genre. While this appeared to be a radical departure from his drawing-room dramas and social allegories, it allowed him to fully embrace his own concept of philosophical romance. It also guaranteed the durability of the Walpole name in one location in particular, in the *Official Guide to Cumberland 1962-1963* (1962) a photograph of Watendlath in Borrowdale by J. Hardman is captioned 'Hugh Walpole country'.⁴

Reputation: the Walpole masterplan

Having already attempted to establish his position as a serious writer with *Fortitude* in 1913, which failed to impress the critics but secured his arrival with its impressive sales, fourteen years later Walpole prepared to stake his reputation on a sequence of historical novels. This was to be a major undertaking, as a journal entry at the time reveals, 'These four novels will *clinch* my reputation or I'll die in the attempt'.⁵ The books were not entirely about securing the Hugh Walpole name for literary posterity, they were also a love-letter to his adopted home. Walpole's purchase of a house, 'Brackenburn', in Cumberland, in 1923, and his

² Steele, p. 17.

³ Swinnerton, p. 172.

⁴ *Cumberland: Official Guide*, Tom Gray and Arthur Millard eds., 'The Face of Cumberland', photographs by J. Hardman (Croydon, Town & Country Publications, 1962), p. 37.

⁵ Walpole, journal entry, in Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 279.

subsequent acceptance by the natives, had encouraged him to repay that kindness in print, 'that Cumbrians, in spite of my 'foreignness', have been so kind to me, is my good fortune'.⁶

In a letter to his publisher Macmillan, dated December 4, 1927, Walpole announced he was about to start writing his 'masterpiece' *Rogue Herries* (1930).⁷ Elizabeth Steele quotes from a note that Thomas Mark, Walpole's editor at Macmillan, shared with biographer Rupert Hart-Davis, describing Sir Frederick Macmillan's apprehensive reaction to the eventual arrival of the manuscript for *Rogue Herries* on completion early in 1929, and the announcement that it was to be the first of four books creating a family saga. Mark says that all at Macmillan were sceptical about the prospects for an historical novel, & thought that Walpole had overstepped himself.⁸ Perry Anderson in his essay on the genre 'From Progress to Catastrophe' (2011), notes that the historical novel had been the predominant literary form up until the Edwardian era, combining popular commercial appeal with aesthetic status, but by the 1920s, was no longer considered 'serious fiction'.⁹ The sobering effects of the recent War had destroyed the glamour of past conflicts, and the rise of modernism had narrowed the literary perspective to subjective interiority rather than any broad panorama. Thomas Mark was ultimately to feel reassured having read Walpole's proofs. While this story would seem to suggest that the arrival of the book was something of a surprise, letters from Walpole to his publisher, such as the one above, had kept both Frederick Macmillan and Thomas Mark fully informed of the intention and

⁶ Walpole, 'A Foreword', *The Herries Chronicle*, p. vii.

⁷ Walpole: Correspondence with Macmillan and Co.: British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), item 143.

⁸ Steele, p. 116.

⁹ Perry Anderson, 'From Progress to Catastrophe', *London Review of Books* [Online] vol. 33 no. 15, 28/07/2011, pp. 24-28, at <https://www-lrb-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/v33/n15/perry-anderson/from-progress-to-catastrophe> [accessed 15/07/2019].

progress of the novel. In October of 1928, Walpole announces that he has written 150,000 words of *Rogue Herries* with 70,000 still to go.¹⁰

Walpole planned four novels that he anticipated would take him ten years to complete, in fact the whole sequence from that start in December 1927, to the publication of the final volume, took only six. The novels were *Rogue Herries* (1930), *Judith Paris* (1931), *The Fortress* (1932), and *Vanessa* (1933). By writing a chronological saga, Walpole was following a lead already established by both Trollope and more recently John Galsworthy, although in his preface to *Judith Paris* Walpole claims he had conceived the plan of a two-hundred-year history of an English family long before Galsworthy developed *The Man of Property* (1906) into *The Forsyte Saga* (1922).¹¹ When his four Herries novels were collected as *The Herries Chronicle* (1939), Walpole revealed in the Preface that he had the writing of an English Chronicle, stretching from the sixteenth-century to modern times, in his mind as early as 1915.¹² This nicely set up his return to the chronicle with *The Bright Pavilions* (1940), with the Catholic-Protestant conflict of Elizabethan times mirrored in the relationship between siblings, within an even earlier depiction of the Herries family.

In his foreword to the Cumberland Edition of *Harmer John* (1934 [1926]), Walpole reveals that the Herries novels were always intended to be the rural companions of his London (Rising City) novels, and his provincial Polchester novels, in the project created to represent England in the first three decades of the twentieth-century.¹³ Walpole does not address the reason why, when the London and Polchester novels were about contemporary life, the Herries novels retreated into the past to start in 1730 and chart the next two centuries. As Walpole claims variously that he kept the ambition behind the ‘life of England’ project, that

¹⁰ Walpole: Correspondence with Macmillan and Co.: British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), items 178-179.

¹¹ Walpole, ‘Prefatory Letter’ in *Judith Paris* (London, Macmillan, 1933), pp. vii-viii.

¹² Walpole, ‘A Foreword’, *The Herries Chronicle*, p. vii.

¹³ Walpole, *Harmer John*, pp. vii-viii.

began with *The Duchess of Wrexe* (1914), a secret, perhaps he felt that its ‘joined-up’ nature had failed to register with the public and the critics for this reason. In this respect, rather than being a facet in a wider scheme, the Herries books assume an ambitious role of their own. A two-hundred-year narrative of English life, designed to illuminate modern England and cap Walpole’s literary career.

In the Foreword to *The Herries Chronicle* (1939), Walpole notes that many critics considered historical novels to be ‘hybrid impossibilities’, but he believed that by showing how humans experienced the same struggles and emotions throughout the generations, ‘a fine sense of the continuity of the brotherhood of Man can be emphasized’.¹⁴ The brotherhood of Man, an optimistic notion first mentioned by Doctor Christopher as he looks to the future in *The Duchess of Wrexe*, surfaces again here, thus linking the novels of *The Herries Chronicle* to the ambition directing the original project. Walpole actually goes beyond expressing the cultural or social value of universal brotherhood in these novels, and strays into an examination of what might be termed spiritual continuity, which seems to spring from an awareness of J. W. Dunne and J. M. E. McTaggart’s theories on the nature of time and consciousness.

Walpole is slightly satirical in his Foreword, referring to ‘the amusing pranks and games’ of the novelists of the last thirty years, while stressing his continued adherence to ‘a loose, narrative, colloquial tradition’, continuing in the steps of Fielding, Scott, and Thackeray ‘with modern variations’.¹⁵ While this appears to be a reiteration of his claim to be merging tradition with modern techniques, Walpole’s adherence to tradition resulted in a form largely unmodified from that established by the novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with modern variations rarely apparent. The awareness of modern technique, prior to the

¹⁴ Walpole, *The Herries Chronicle*, p. vii.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Herries books, seems confined to occasional critical observations on modern writing, made by those of his traditionally-minded characters with a literary bent, or directly by Walpole as narrator. Psychological motivation is rarely illustrated by a character's thoughts or actions on the page, without an accompanying explanatory commentary to hammer the emphasis home. Fielding, Scott, and Thackeray were writers whose embrace of various forms of 'realism' saw the transition of the 'romance' into the 'novel', transition rarely being achieved by standing still. By venturing into historical fiction Walpole fully embraces the traditional novel of romance by writing a romantic novel set in its own eighteenth-century period, transition then take place in 'real time', over the subsequent two centuries, to address the 'realism' of the 1930s.

History as Literature

Walpole's desire to pay tribute to Cumberland, his adopted home for as long as he could bear to be out of the public eye in London, allowed him to add his own contribution to the literature already celebrating the region. Walter Scott's novel *Redgauntlet* (1824), a particular favourite of Walpole's, not only includes Cumberland as a significant location for some of the action, but Sir Hugh Redgauntlet's assumed name, Herries of Birrenswork, probably supplied Walpole with a source for the Herries name. Walpole had the setting for his family saga, but one must still examine the decision to formulate his life of England through the historical novel genre.

This chapter has already speculated that Walpole might have chosen to fully embrace the traditional novel by writing an historical romance in a 'romantic' era. When considering the 'padding' in *The Fortress* (1932), the third novel in the Herries saga, Steele suggests that Walpole may have been 'aping its period (1822-74)' by producing his version of the three-

volume Victorian novel.¹⁶ Given that Walpole's novels often bring with them a sense of pastiche, this suggests that Walpole may have been fitting form to function, using journal entries, letters between characters, expository analysis, and authorial interjections, techniques familiar from the novel of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in a display of metafictional awareness. This would be a more convincing argument if those 'traditional' techniques were not already such a feature of Walpole's novels of contemporary life.

Walpole may have been more at ease with the relative certainties provided by historical distance than with the liminal flux of his own period, or, in his role as literary reassurer-in-chief to his readers, he may have sought to emphasise that periods of social and political upheaval were nothing new. It seems certain that he was also aiming to emulate Scott by creating an imagined past within a solid historical context, where his 'wild excursions into the macabre', such a source of dismay to Charles Morgan and other critics, may have sat more comfortably.¹⁷

In 'From Progress to Catastrophe', Perry Anderson summarises the principles, derived from the work of Walter Scott, underpinning György Lukács's influential work *The Historical Novel* (1962 [1937 Russia]).

The classical form of the historical novel is an epic depicting a transformation of popular life through a set of representative human types whose lives are reshaped by sweeping social forces. Famous historical figures will feature among the dramatis personae, but their roles in the tale will be oblique or marginal. Narratives will centre instead on middling characters, of no great distinction, whose function is to offer an individual focus for the dramatic collision of opposing extremes between whom they stand, or more often waver. What Scott's novels then stage is a tragic contest between declining and ascending forms of social life, in a vision of the past that honours the losers but upholds the historical necessity of the winners. The classic historical novel, inaugurated by *Waverley*, is an affirmation of human progress, in and through the conflicts that divide societies and the individuals within them.¹⁸

¹⁶ Steele, p.124.

¹⁷ Morgan, *The House of Macmillan (1843-1943)*, p. 215.

¹⁸ Anderson, 'From Progress to Catastrophe', *London Review of Books* [Online] vol. 33 no. 15, 28/07/2011, pp. 24-28, at <https://www-lrb-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/v33/n15/perry-anderson/from-progress-to-catastrophe> [accessed 03/07/2019]. Subsequent references are to this journal.

Lukács analyses Scott from a perspective of Marxist class consciousness, suggesting that what matters in the historical novel:

is not the retelling of great historical events, but the poetic awakening of the people who figured in those events. What matters is that we should re-experience the social and human motives which led men to think, feel and act just as they did in historical reality.¹⁹

To simplify, Lukács argues that this is best achieved by focussing on the everyday detail of the lives of ‘ordinary’ people, and ‘middling’ protagonists as opposed to the Byronic hero of romance. Lukács sees Scott as a realist, and his novels as the continuation of the eighteenth-century realist social novel, ultimately revealing how the modern world has come about. As a Marxist, Lukács places particular emphasis on Scott’s marking of the decline of the aristocracy and the rise of the bourgeoisie, which Scott charts dispassionately, despite his own conservative sympathies, as the inevitable result of progress.²⁰ At one point, discussing Hegel, Lukács observes that Scott, Hegel’s contemporary, would have been unlikely to have heard of the philosopher, much less understood him.²¹ Lukács and Walpole were also contemporaries, but there is no evidence that Walpole was aware of the other’s work.²² It is unlikely that Walpole, given his conservatism and resistance to literary theory, would have countenanced Lukács’s Marxist approach, but their views on Scott and the realist portrayal of ordinary people in his fiction were not dissimilar. In *Vanessa* (1933) the young painter Timothy Bellairs expresses his philosophy of history:

‘Little temptations to meanness, lusts, sacrifices. Small tests, tests as small as a pin – but soul-histories are the only histories. Write an account of a family or a county and find out where the crises of the human spirit lie. See how it meets all the tests, is beaten, is victorious, encounters its two chief enemies, greed and fear, is encouraged to extend into something wider, grander, nobler than itself. Shakespeare knew that that was the only kind of history. What are the stories of his six great kings but soul-histories? What does he care for national history? [...] To escape beyond oneself!

¹⁹ Georg Lukács, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, *The Historical Novel* (Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1981), p. 44.

²⁰ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, pp. 32-33.

²¹ Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, p. 29.

²² Walpole also read Hegel, but admits his thoughts would wander after a page or two, see *Reading*, p. 50.

To lose one's soul because one's beyond fear, and so to save it. That's the history of the endeavour of every man and woman born on this earth. The only thing that gives us grandeur, fleas on a cinder as we are!'²³

As well as expressing an approach to history that foregrounds the individual and personal, the reference to losing and saving one's soul by overcoming fear, is a reiteration of Walpole's use of limit-experience.

While Lukács's work is still perhaps the most influential treatment of its subject, its assumptions have been variously challenged or at the very least modified. Perry Anderson's essay references Fredric Jameson in recasting Scott as a provider of costume drama enacting 'a binary opposition between good and evil'.²⁴ Ladislav Nagy argues that Lukács overemphasises Scott's realism at the expense of his ties to the romantic novel.²⁵ Fredric Jameson suggests that Lukács isn't really interested in the historical novel, 'but rather in the novel as such, in realism and the realistic novel, which when it comes into its own will be profoundly historical and will let History appear more effectively than its earlier, more specialized vehicle'.²⁶ This is the argument that all novels are potential historical documents, and brings us back to Walpole's own observation that people probably do 'read novels for their pictures of past social conditions'.²⁷

Walpole's decision to write historical novels, love-letter to the Lakes aside, appears to be a retreat into the past from his planned engagement with modern times, unless of course his approach proved to be radically modern in execution which seemed on his record to be unlikely. *Orlando* (1928), the modern historical novel that did emerge from this period to

²³ Walpole, *Vanessa* in *The Herries Chronicle* (London, The Reprint Society, 1939), p.1377. Subsequent textual references to the Herries novels: *Rogue Herries*, *Judith Paris*, *The Fortress*, and *Vanessa*, are to this collected edition of *The Herries Chronicle*.

²⁴ Anderson, 'From Progress to Catastrophe', pp. 24-28, at <https://www-lrb-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/v33/n15/perry-anderson/from-progress-to-catastrophe> [accessed 11/07/2019].

²⁵ Ladislav Nagy, 'Historical Fiction as a Mixture of History and Romance: Towards the Genre Definition of the Historical Novel', in *Prague Journal of English Studies*, Volume 3, No. 1, 2014, pp.7-17, at <https://content.sciendo.com/view/journals/pjes/3/1/article-p7.xml> [accessed 11/07/2019].

²⁶ Fredric Jameson, 'The Historical Novel Today, or, Is It Still Possible?', in *The Antimonies of Realism* (Verso, London, 2015), p.264.

²⁷ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. xi.

challenge the genre's conventions, and which Walpole would claim to have affected his own work, was to come from other hands.

Who's afraid of historical romance?

Hugh Walpole's relationship with Virginia Woolf is sometimes represented in terms of Walpole, his face metaphorically pressed up against the windows of Bloomsbury, being tolerated by the intellectually superior Woolf, who shamelessly teased him, or paraded him for the amusement of her circle. This is a scenario endorsed by D. J. Taylor in *The Prose Factory* (2016), who quotes Isaiah Berlin to that effect.²⁸ Walpole and Woolf first met at a lunch in 1923, where she endeared herself to him by praising Walter Scott.²⁹ Their friendship proper might be said to have started when she invited him to dinner after he was chosen to present her with the *Femina - Vie Heureuse* Prize in May of 1928. Hart-Davis says that Walpole was flattered to be admitted into the drawing-rooms of the intelligentsia while his intellectual inferiority complex could not quite dispel the suspicion that he was being laughed at.³⁰ In any event the friendship continued until their deaths in the same year of 1941, and it seems unlikely that Woolf could have tolerated such a long association purely for its amusement value at the other's expense without genuine affection on her part. Walpole in turn was fulsome in praise of Woolf's work, and suggested that her literary influence helped to start to dispel some of the 'sententiousness and sentimentality' in his own.³¹

The novels of his in which Walpole claimed to see Woolf's influence were *Hans Frost* (1929) and *Rogue Herries* (1930). *Hans Frost* is the story of a Grand Old Man of English Letters, living in semi-retirement in his seventieth year, with a public reputation managed by his younger wife, with the result that he has grown lazy and his creative impulse all but dried

²⁸ D. J. Taylor, 'Hugh Walpole: The Perils of Success', in *The Prose Factory* (London, Vintage, 2016), pp. 78-79.

²⁹ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 240.

³⁰ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, pp. 289-290.

³¹ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, pp. 302-303.

up. Into this stasis comes his wife's nineteen-year-old niece Nathalie, as another example of a Walpole intruder about to disrupt the stagnant status quo. Uncle-by-marriage and niece form a passionate but platonic alliance, which sours the existing marital relationship but rekindles the man's creative zest, to the end that he leaves his comfortable home and his comfortable wife and starts writing again. Walpole, already full of praise for *To the Lighthouse* (1927), felt he was writing in the 'manner' of Woolf, having been 'liberated' by her.³² The next book that he felt benefitted from Woolf's influence would be *Rogue Herries*, by which time the Hogarth Press had published *Orlando* (1928), Woolf's own version of a historical romance, which Walpole considered to be 'all genius', in comparison to his own 'good talent'.³³

Writing in her diary in September of 1927, Virginia Woolf had the idea to sketch the outline of her friends, like a 'grand historical picture [...] a way of writing the memoirs of one's own times during people's lifetimes'; her friend and lover, Vita Sackville-West, was to be 'Orlando, a young nobleman', and her other friends were to be featured as well.³⁴ By October the book *Orlando* was to be all about Vita, a fictionalised biography starting in 1500 and spanning the four centuries to the present day, 'only with a change about from one sex to another', a fantastic device which presumably would get around the portrayal of the subject's bisexuality.³⁵ What is notable is that Woolf envisaged the work not only as a celebration of her friend but as a kind of social history; Walpole's *Herries* books were conceived with a similar ambition. Woolf writes *Orlando* to immortalise Vita while Walpole writes *Herries* as a hymn of appreciation to the Lake District. Woolf covers four hundred years of English history through a seemingly immortal individual, Walpole charts two hundred years through

³² Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 279.

³³ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 290.

³⁴ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (London, Hogarth Press, 1953), in *Virginia Woolf: The Complete Collection*, location 61226 of 182519.

³⁵ Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary*, in *Virginia Woolf: The Complete Collection*, location 61268 of 182519.

the generations of a single family. Woolf has her leading character change gender, Walpole's story switches emphasis between male and female protagonists as it progresses. It is tempting to see Woolf's influence on Walpole's writing as something more than a matter of style and the encouragement to abandon sententiousness and sentimentality, as Walpole claims. In fact, Walpole began writing *Rogue Herries* in December of 1927, and Woolf finished *Orlando* in January 1928, the pair's friendship blossomed in May of that year, allowing for Walpole to be named in *Orlando*'s preface, among Woolf's many friends who had helped her in ways 'too various to specify', when the book was published in October.³⁶ Synchronicity aside, *Orlando*'s success must have convinced Walpole that there was an audience for historical romance with a touch of the fantastic.

Rogue tourist

The Herries Chronicle was a massive undertaking for Walpole, but one that he brought in within five years of writing rather than the ten he had anticipated.³⁷ This social history of England as seen through the experiences of a representative English family, albeit one that for all their vicissitudes still largely enjoy the privileges of aristocracy, was to be his masterpiece, but some of that ambition for the work seems to have been tempered as time went on. Upon his receipt of the single-volume collected edition in 1939, and as he was concluding writing the resumption of the saga in Elizabethan times in *The Bright Pavilions* (1940), he imagines future visitors to the Lakes dipping into the volume, if only for the familiarity of 'the real names of local places'.³⁸ From wishing to fuse tradition with modern psychology in his writing, he now concedes his magnum opus 'carries the English novel no

³⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'Preface', in *Orlando: A Biography* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 5. Subsequent references are to this edition.

³⁷ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, pp. 333-334.

³⁸ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 414.

whit further but it *sustains* tradition and has vitality'.³⁹ In fact, within the great sweep of two hundred years of English history covered in the chronicle, an often bewildering array of characters and familial relations, interspersed with painterly descriptions of the Cumberland countryside, Walpole does display a commanding range of techniques in a sequence of bravura set-pieces which are among the most accomplished passages of writing in any of his books.

In *Rogue Herries*, Francis Herries uproots his family to take up residence in the decaying ancestral home at Rosthwaite in Cumberland's Borrowdale valley. He takes with him his wife, his three children, and the children's governess his mistress, whom he later 'sells' at a fair in Keswick.⁴⁰ He rapidly garners a bad reputation in the neighbourhood as much for his surly demeanour as for his loose morals. The only person he loves is his son David, who in turn idolises his father while having no illusions as to the older man's temperament. Father and son are a classic Walpole pairing. David is physically impressive, and down-to-earth, and after acquiring a wife sets about establishing himself as a wealthy gentleman-landowner and head of his own dynasty. Francis, while the epitome of toxic masculinity, is the foil to his son in that he is a dreamer and a romantic. This dichotomy of materialism versus imagination is repeated down through the family tree in subsequent volumes of the saga. Francis becomes obsessed by Mirabell Starr, a red-headed vagabond girl whom he first encounters while she is still a child, and despite their thirty years age difference this *amour fou* is at the heart of the novel.

Planning *The Bright Pavilions* (1940), his return to the Herries family in the autumn of 1937, Walpole wrote in his journal "The theme will be God against Devil, as in all my books

³⁹ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 414.

⁴⁰ The obvious textual link to this incident is Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). While a similar transaction drives the plot in the earlier book, Walpole uses his version simply to establish Herries's 'Rogue' character with the local community and the reader, and dispose of a superfluous sexual entanglement clearing the field for the eventual appearance of Mirabelle Starr. Such examples of intertextuality are also perhaps 'rewards' for an erudite audience.

and especially the Herries books, and I don't care how often I do it'''.⁴¹ In fact, while there is no mistaking right and wrong in Walpole's books, good and evil are rarely so starkly portrayed. David Herries meets a pedlar who is 'wicked and gay', and who announces himself to be the Devil, claiming that the boy's father is an old friend.⁴² The pedlar shares David's food and makes him the gift of a small silver box, declaring that his intentions are not always as unfriendly as people claim.⁴³ Villains such as the Pengelly brothers in *Above the Dark Circus* (1931), and Tunstall/Talbot in *The Killer and the Slain*, seem to have crossed a line where self-interest outweighs any moral consideration, to the extent that they may be considered evil men. Other prominent villainous characters appear merely unscrupulous, or driven on by some mental derangement. Evil, when it is encountered, tends to refer to actions and consequences rather than individuals. Meanwhile, matter-of-fact encounters like David and the Devil are rendered more plausible for being set in an era when, as Walpole's ancestral cousin Horace suggested about his own imagined past, such phenomena were generally believed.

Later, in *Vanessa* (1933), the final volume in this first sequence of Herries, David's great-great-grandson Benjie meets the Endicotts, Thomas and his sons George and Robert, cousins by remove of Mirabell Starr. As the beer flows, Robert Endicott, 'restless and given to gestures', falls out with Benjie, and declares, "I was here in this country before any of you were born. Aye, and I was too, selling laces and silver boxes, visiting the witches in Borrowdale".⁴⁴ Robert is silenced by his brother and father, but not before Benjie, in a drunken vision, sees him as 'a dozen little men with peaked caps on their heads, riding

⁴¹ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 388.

⁴² Walpole, *Rogue Herries*, p. 62.

⁴³ Walpole is certainly paying tribute to Scott here; in the 'Wandering Willie's Tale' sequence to *Redgauntlet* (1824) the Devil declares "I am one that, though I have been sair miscaa'd in the world, am the only hand for helping my friends", Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet Vol. I* (London, Heron Books, undated ca. 1970), p.163.

⁴⁴ Walpole, *Vanessa*, pp. 1168-1172.

through the kitchen on the wind and rain'.⁴⁵ The intervening century has seen the charismatic pedlar-Devil of *Rogue Herries* reduced to a mentally-disturbed individual, 'sat in a corner by the fireplace, waving his hands and making shadows of rabbits on the wall with his fingers'.⁴⁶ Uncanny phenomena have less traction as the novels approach modernity, just as Walpole sees romance falling out of favour, and the Power of Evil being transformed 'into glands and ducts' and explained away sociologically.⁴⁷

Francis and David travel to Carlisle where, as it is now November of 1745, they become caught up in the Young Pretender's siege of the city. Francis is indifferent to events, his mind is elsewhere, and he displays the same historical ignorance that Underwood notes is shown by the titular hero of Scott's novel *Waverley* (1814), also set during the second Jacobite Rebellion.⁴⁸ The reason for Francis's distraction is his obsession with Mirabell Starr and the possibility that they might meet again in the city. Mirabell is there with her lover Harry, and Harry's false friend Thawn, who has his own designs on the girl. As the siege develops, Francis and David are persuaded to join the defence of the town and Francis finds himself sharing a defensive position with both Harry and Thawn. Despite Francis believing he has left his old life behind because of his love for the girl, the cold night and the fog make him prey to bad thoughts, 'He now lusted for her in exactly the way that, in his younger days, he had lusted for many women. His hands touched her hair, her small child's face, her little breasts, her waist, her knees, coldly, with desire but no fine passion'.⁴⁹ Walpole's fiction had toyed with murder and violence before but had shied away from being explicit about sex. Although the language of Walpole's fiction may be considered quite restrained, even by the standards of his own time, what he saw as a new departure from sententiousness and

⁴⁵ Walpole, *Vanessa*, p. 1172.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Walpole, *Four Fantastic Tales*, p. ix.

⁴⁸ Underwood, p.17.

⁴⁹ Walpole, *Rogue Herries*, p. 173.

sentimentality brought its own reaction from his readership, complaints from ‘old ladies’ as he noted in a letter to Harold Macmillan.⁵⁰ Francis goes on to imagine the invading army approaching the city, burning settlements, and killing and raping, and his evil thoughts eventually focus on Mirabell’s lover Harry. Pressed, thigh to thigh, with the man Thawn, Francis seems party to the other man’s thoughts, and he realises that both of them hate Harry and desire Mirabell for themselves. In the sequence that follows, Walpole describes a spoken dialogue between the two, in which commonplaces about the siege mask an unspoken intent:

The man growled: ‘The cold is more biting with every second.’
 (And behind the words: ‘Press your fingers into his windpipe. I will keep guard.’)
 Herries answered: ‘The cold will be worse for the second watch.’
 (‘Keep guard for yourself. I am my own guard.’)
 The man’s cold hairy hand touched Herries’ fingers.
 ‘This town can stand no siege unless Wade relieves it.’
 (And behind the words: ‘It will be quickly done. Catch him by the neck. Press his head back.’)
 Herries said: ‘Well, Wade should have been here to-day if he were coming.’
 (‘But it is my affair. Leave me alone to my own deed.’)⁵¹

Walpole crafts the passage in an interesting way, the spoken exchange is presented as an almost monologic discourse, a sequence of statements prompted by what has gone before but hardly advancing a dialogue. The unspoken exchange of temptation and rebuttal is a genuine dialogue, but bears no relation to what has been said out-loud between the two men. Herries is projecting his desire to do away with Harry onto the man Thawn, a sort of evil twin, who he suspects, correctly as it turns out, of sharing his own impulses. Thawn later stabs Harry to death, leaving Mirabell destitute once more and forced to accede to Francis’s marriage proposal for her own safety.

Another sequence, striking for Walpole making good on his ambition to attempt new techniques with his traditional approach to narrative, features Mrs Wilson, one of the Herries’ servants, a native of Borrowdale with a local reputation as a witch. Isolated, and fearful of

⁵⁰ Steele, p. 122.

⁵¹ Walpole, *Rogue Herries*, p. 177.

going out-of-doors because of the local community's hatred of her, Mrs Wilson hears that her oldest friend is dying and determines to pay her a visit. Believing that a selfless gesture such as this will restore her standing in the district, and despite her age, she embarks upon the two-hour trek to Grange, meditating upon her life as she walks. Walpole adopts a third-person limited-subjective narrative voice for the sequence, which results in a form of stream of consciousness writing:

They said she was a witch. Was she a witch? She did not know. They said that the troubles of the last year were her doing. Were they? She did not know. Sometimes she thought that they were and felt an odd impulse of power. Was it true that by crooking a finger or nodding her head she could kill sheep, scatter the palsy, burn hay-ricks, poison food? It might be so. She did not know.⁵²

Arriving at her friend's house, Mrs Wilson finds her already dead, whereupon the local villagers who have observed her arrival seize her, strip and bind her, and hurl her in the River Derwent to see if she sinks or swims. Herries, alerted by another of his servants as to what is happening, rides over from Rosthwaite but is too late to save her.

There was a desperate impulse in her now to say something, but she could not speak. Her terror urged her that if she could only make them listen she would persuade them that she was no witch, but only a harmless old woman who had never done any harm.⁵³

Judith the outsider

Towards the end of *Rogue Herries*, after another separation, Francis and Mirabell are reunited, and eventually Mirabell accepts Francis's love and the marriage is consummated. Any hope for a happy ending is short-lived. Francis is an old man, worn out by self-neglect, and Mirabell's life has been one of almost constant hardship and abuse. Mirabell dies giving birth to their daughter, and Francis expires too. *Rogue Herries* ends with the parents both dead and the baby crying. In a short introductory chapter, the sequel, *Judith Paris* (1931), begins where the previous volume left off. Mrs Henny, a local woman who has helped with

⁵² Walpole, *Rogue Herries*, p. 143.

⁵³ Walpole, *Rogue Herries*, p. 151.

the birth, has laid out the corpses and exhausted by her labours and the cold, drinks gin and falls asleep. A passing neighbour, Squire Gauntry, hearing a baby crying, finds two dead bodies in the house, the servant who he assumes to be drunk, and the helpless infant whom he rescues and takes to his house Stone Ends at Caldbeck. The book immediately moves on eleven years. Judith has been raised at Uldale in the home of her half-brother David, who is fifty-five years older than her. She has divided her time between her Herries family and the unbuttoned society of her 'Uncle' Squire Gauntry at Stone Ends, where she has learned independence.

Judith grows up to have an indomitable spirit; Walpole not only shows this at first-hand through his portrayal of the character, but rarely misses the opportunity to tell the reader as much, either directly or through the interior monologues of other admiring characters. Judith has her own adventures, marriage to a French smuggler and thief, Georges Paris, who murders a rival and is himself killed by the murdered man's father. Widowed, she has a child, Adam, by an adoring distant cousin whom she does not love, and when the father dies from a heart attack, during a violent incident in Paris following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, she devotes herself to her child and becomes an unwilling mediator in a wider Herries family feud.

Walpole's usual strategy, of introducing an intruder into an apparently stable environment to disrupt that situation, for good or ill, is subverted slightly for his Herries books. Harry Trojan, returning to his family after years away in *The Wooden Horse* (1909), was as much a stranger to his family as that genuine intruder, Phillip Mark, who returned to England from Russia to upset the Trenchards in *The Green Mirror* (1918). In the Herries novels the threatened environment, or structure, is once again a family group, but the disruption is not caused by an intruder, in the person of a long-lost relative making a return, or a stranger, challenging the status quo. The conflict within the Herries family is a philosophical one,

between those parts of the family embracing materialism and those concerned with spiritual values. One may still discern the lines of demarcation, between the superficially stable family unit, and the disruptive intruder, but this time the intruder is already embedded within the family despite their 'outsider' status. The outsiders within the Herries family are marked out from birth, with no geographical estrangement to explain away their difference. Francis Herries, as the 'Rogue' of the title of the first book, establishes the character, while his son David, in laying-down a foundation of prosperity and stability for his own family, provides the oppositional, conventional respectability, that future 'rogue' family members will reject. Rogue's daughter, Judith, diminutive, red-haired like her mother Mirabell, younger than David's children Francis, Deborah, and William, who are her nieces and nephews, and at odds with polite society due to her unconventional upbringing, continues this strain which will recur throughout the succeeding generations. At first encounter, this difference in treatment by Walpole of his stock-in-trade 'intruder' plot device might appear so subtle as to be negligible, but it offers the opportunity for a more sophisticated approach to the psychology of familial relationships.

While the gist of *Judith Paris* might be said to revolve around Judith, her life and loves, another aspect of the plot focusses on a family feud that will resonate through subsequent books. Judith has two nephews, Francis and William, and a niece Deborah, her half-brother David's children. William is practical and unimaginative, marries well in London and goes into trade, Francis, whom Judith adores, is artistically inclined and writes articles for journals. Jennifer Cards, a Herries cousin, falls out with William's wife Christabel at a society party, setting in motion the resulting feud. Francis takes Jennifer's side against his brother and sister-in-law, before courting and marrying her. Francis and Jennifer settle in Uldale where a bored Jennifer starts an affair which eventually leads to Francis's suicide. William's son

Walter also settles in Cumberland, seemingly with the sole purpose of perpetuating the feud and destroying Francis and Jennifer by any means.

Reality versus Romance

The juxtaposition between practical realists and imaginative romantics was already a staple device within Walpole's work before *The Herries Chronicle*. Walpole's doubling of opposites contrasted down-to-earth Maradick with the romantic Tony Gale in *Maradick at Forty* (1910), and the artistic young Peter Wescott with his giant friend and protector Stephen Brent in *Fortitude* (1913). The imaginative strain in the Herries family is represented by the recurring image, vouchsafed to certain characters, of a white horse, seen struggling to emerge from a tarn. Elizabeth Steele identifies this image with various symbolic interpretations, including a Jungian motif of 'intuitive understanding'.⁵⁴ Whatever the significance of the image or vision, it identifies those members of the family gifted, or possibly cursed, with imaginative longings.⁵⁵

On the other side of the artistic/practical divide are the unabashed capitalists. While David Herries's wealth and status is based on farming, and the acquisition of land and tenants, David's son William moves to London in 1791, makes a good marriage, and goes into 'Indian trade, tea, silks, and spices'.⁵⁶ Walpole has the materialist side of the Herries family reflect the transition from an agrarian economy in England in the latter part of the eighteenth-century. William seizes the opportunities provided by the end of mercantilism, and the opening-up of free trade at this point in history, to exploit the importation of luxury goods

⁵⁴ Steele, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 133. A somewhat selective reading of her source material, J. E. Cirlot, trans. Jack Sage, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York, 1962). See also J. E. Cirlot, trans. Jack Sage, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London, Routledge, 1971), p. 152, edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2001, at https://www.academia.edu/7141304/A_Dictionary_of_Symbols_J.E._Cirlot [accessed 13/06/2019].

⁵⁵ Although hardly a comparable use of symbolism, it is interesting, given this study's identification of the synchronicity between *Rogue Herries* and *Orlando*, that Woolf also uses a recurring image, the pursuit of a grey goose, to signify Orlando's quest for literary fame. See Victoria L. Smith, "'Ransacking the Language': Finding the Missing Goods in Virginia Woolf's 'Orlando,'" *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2006 (pp. 57–75), p. 66, *JSTOR*, at <http://www.jstor.org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/3831880> [accessed 13/06/2019].

⁵⁶ Walpole, *Judith Paris*, p. 441.

with his tea, silks, and spices. William's legitimate trading may be compared with the smuggling practiced by Judith's husband Georges Paris, to further distinguish between the two strands of the family. The decline of the agrarian economy, and resulting tensions in rural communities in this period, features in passing towards the end of *Judith Paris* when reference is made to a spate of barn and hay-rick burning by disaffected agricultural workers demonstrating against their landowning employers.

Alongside the romantic/realist dichotomy recurring within successive generations of Herries, Walpole is at pains to indicate the growth of the family, and its representation throughout English society. Towards the end of the book he notes that from fairly humble beginnings, by '1930 they were everywhere', and 'They had become part of England'.⁵⁷

Families at war, and their place in history

Walpole writes in *Judith Paris* 'This book is the history of a country, England', it is also the history of the Herries family, that family's struggle, and the struggle of the individual members of the family; 'The history of that struggle is the history of this book, is the history, perhaps, of every book that has ever been written'.⁵⁸ Walpole goes on to suggest that these histories, individual, family, country, are inextricably interlinked, and consequently the history of the individual can reflect the state of the nation. This is rather a portentous means of Walpole indicating that he is using his fictional Herries family history to say something about England, as he has attempted in the past with his aristocratic Beaminsters, and his upper-middle class Trenchards. The great events that foreshadowed the individual histories of the Beaminsters and Trenchards were the First World War and the Russian Revolution.

⁵⁷ Walpole, *Vanessa*, p. 1466. The various strands of the extended Herries family, and their relationship with one another, can be confusing, made more so by the recurrence of christian names. When referring to the family names of Cards, Rockage, Bellairs, Newmark, and Ormerod, relatives of the Herries, this study will usually describe them as 'cousins' for the sake of convenience.

⁵⁸ Walpole, *Judith Paris*, p. 441. It is perhaps a measure of the author's chauvinism that Walpole seems to use 'England' when he appears to be writing about Britain as a whole.

These events drew Clemence Dane to draw a comparison between the novel of character and ideas as practiced by Hugh Walpole in his time, and the literature that arose at the time of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, an ‘attempt to relate at one and the same time the history of an idea and the history of a human being’.⁵⁹ Dane was not suggesting a comparison with novels featuring the lives of world historic characters, such as Napoleon himself, but rather stories set in turbulent times focussing on ordinary individuals. Here too is the suggestion that romance is the most effective medium in which to tell the history of turbulent times.

Aside from being a love-letter to the Lake District, with a concurrent theme of good versus evil, God against the Devil, Walpole was saying something about England, which is what his characters regularly take time out to do. Walpole’s text, articulated by Judith in *Judith Paris*, is that families like the Herries, with their belief in themselves, and in their country, made England what it was, ‘the dominant power of the world, the queen of the Earth!’⁶⁰

Later, when the chronicle has moved on into the nineteenth-century, Barney Newmark, the novelist in the family, explains to Vanessa, Judith Paris’s granddaughter, that although the family is as old as any in England, they are not of the first rank. He tells her that the social history of England is important, because it is history, and ‘because in another fifty years’ time there won’t be any social history’.⁶¹ The passage of fifty years that Barney talks about means he is anticipating Walpole’s own time, the society of the 1930s. He identifies the component members of the Herries family as being drawn from provincial spinsters, minor nobility, churchmen and city gents. Crucially, in Barney’s argument, as the members of this vaguely-defined strata, spanning the middle-class spectrum die out, their places will be filled by members of the lower ranks who become just like them, without aspiring to rise any higher.

⁵⁹ Dane, pp. 72-73.

⁶⁰ Walpole, *The Fortress*, pp. 942-943.

⁶¹ Walpole, *Vanessa*, pp. 1126-1127.

Barney doesn't say it, but the observation seems to be that old cliché, 'we are all middle-class now'. Moving on from his vision of social integration, Barney suggests that the Herries have a high opinion of themselves because, apart from each generation's 'rogue' character, they have no imagination. Equally, if there is ever a revolution in England it is Herries and others like them that will save the country. The only thing Herries are frightened of is anything out of the normal, which they cannot assimilate and consequently seek to destroy. The Herries are it seems interchangeable with the English, and the English are naturally middle-class and somewhat philistine. It is no coincidence that it is Barney the novelist who expresses these views, given that they anticipate Walpole's own description of the English, as a middlebrow middle-class, as postulated in his *Open Letter of an Optimist* (1941).⁶² Barney's later attempt at prescience is somewhat more hit-and-miss:

The English will always be snobs because they care about caste. But it's a fine sort of snobbery as the world is at present. Keeps the right people at the top. One day when the whole world is democratic and cares more for doing things than being them, it will all seem ridiculous. Then England will become a third-rate Power and everyone will be happier than they've been for centuries.⁶³

Witnessing history

In *Rogue Herries* and *Judith Paris*, Walpole illustrates the 'history' in the books in one of two ways. His first approach is to deliver some commentary upon what is happening in England or Europe at that particular moment of time in the novel, using an authorial voice which at times seems to take pride in its own display of scholarship. The second approach sets up situations where his characters experience real events and meet with world-historical figures.

Early in *Rogue Herries* Walpole lists some of the events of 1734, he mentions John Gay and Alexander Pope, notes the calls in Westminster for the repeal of the Septennial Act fixing the

⁶² Walpole, *Open Letter of an Optimist*, pp. 19-20.

⁶³ Walpole, *Vanessa*, p. 1199.

length of parliament, and makes some gossip observations upon the rivalry between the Tory leader Bolingbroke and Walpole's own ancestor the Whig statesman Robert Walpole. In *Reading* (1926), Walpole says he knows nothing of history other than 'some sensational episodes', and episodic allusions like these are scattered throughout the Herries novels as a sort of establishing context.⁶⁴ He was certainly familiar with Thomas Carlyle's histories, as he reveals in *Reading*, but it was the drama of events that captured his imagination while he balked at 'the arrays of dates and national movements and successions of kings and princes'.⁶⁵

The random events of 1734, as listed by Walpole, place the current action of the novel within its wider historical context. This allows the author to go on to make the contrast with the young David Herries' absorption in his own particular world, the world of Borrowdale, arguably at the furthest possible remove from London political and cultural life.⁶⁶ Later in the book, as an example of Walpole's other treatment of history, Francis 'Rogue' Herries takes part in the defence of Carlisle against the invading Jacobite army, meets the Young Pretender after the siege, and is asked by the Prince if he should continue his advance on London.⁶⁷ Other moments of historical context, or 'colour', seem placed to add a sense of authenticity or to allow Walpole space for some cultural name-dropping. In *Judith Paris*, Rogue's grandson Francis takes his aunt Judith to meet Robert Southey and his family at Greta Hall. Judith meets the young Hartley Coleridge, and Southey shows them his library and talks about Wordsworth and Shelley, and his own love of the Lakes.⁶⁸ Walpole may be being playful here, like Southey he had his own vast library at his home at Brackenburn, and

⁶⁴ Walpole, *Reading*, p. 44.

⁶⁵ Walpole, *Reading*, p. 56.

⁶⁶ Walpole, *Rogue Herries*, pp. 79-80.

⁶⁷ Walpole, *Rogue Herries*, pp. 178-192.

⁶⁸ Walpole, *Judith Paris*, pp. 563-574.

as an incomer he too was rigorous in asserting his fondness for the district, and gratitude for his acceptance by the locals.

It is worth asking if Walpole's foray into this genre should be redefined. For much of the time the books appear to be period romances in which the author addresses universal themes independent of their temporal setting, rather than works in which historical events and world historical characters are integral to the narrative. However, if real history is tangential to the action of *Rogue Herries* and *Judith Paris*, simply offering period colour, it assumes a greater role as the saga continues.

The Fortress

In *The Fortress* (1932), the feud between William and Christabel Herries, and Francis and Jennifer, is continued after Francis commits suicide. Walter Herries, Will's son, moves to Cumberland apparently with the sole purpose of escalating it. He proposes to build a house, the Fortress of the title, at High Ireby, overlooking Jennifer's home at Uldale. Judith gives up any hope of returning to her own home at Watendlath and moves in with Jennifer to protect her. Fear of Walter eventually drives Jennifer mad, and she dies, but the feud continues to the next generation. Jennifer's son John, and Walter's daughter Elizabeth, fall in love, elope and marry, but their union does not end the inter-family animosity. Walter falls into dissolution, while his disabled son Uhland, driven by an obsessive hatred, stalks John and schemes at his destruction.

If the feud between these two strands of the Herries family provides the core of the book, Walpole uses the character of Judith's son Adam to dip into social history. To placate Adam's youthful restlessness, Judith takes him to London to stay with the Newmarks, another branch of the ever-expanding clan. Stephen Newmark lectures Judith upon the state of the Nation providing a narrative exposition on the England of 1830, covering the death of

William Huskisson MP, run over by Stephenson's 'Rocket' in September, the widening gap between rich and poor, and the clamour for 'Reform' to extend the franchise and clean up 'rotten boroughs'.⁶⁹ Judith and Adam are taken to the Adelphi Theatre by some other relatives, after which they get caught in a demonstration stirred up by the radical reformist politician Henry Hunt. As is usually the case in Walpole, the marching citizenry soon become a rioting mob. These early incidents pave the way for the adult Adam's later career. Befriended in London by a German-born radical called Caesar Kraft, and his daughter Margaret whom he subsequently marries, Adam joins the Chartists and becomes a campaigning writer. Rising through the ranks, he attends the mass meeting of the Chartist Convention on Kennington Common in the Year of Revolution 1848, and after the crowd are prevented from marching on Parliament, he witnesses the death of Kraft at the hands of another radical angered by Kraft's pacifism. Disillusioned, Adam leaves the movement, eventually returning to Cumberland with Margaret, and turning from radical pamphleteering to writing fairy-stories.

It is tempting to read Walpole's evident disquiet with mass working-class movements such as Chartism as arising from his experiences in Russia in March 1917, when he witnessed the first revolution. He writes in *Open Letter of an Optimist* (1941) of the feeling of optimism as 'we walked the streets of Petrograd, thousands and thousands of us, under the sun, singing, believing that not only ourselves but the whole world was liberated'.⁷⁰ That this idealist expectation subsequently went sour may have prompted his later disillusionment, or even disquiet, with proletarian mobilisation. In fact, a reading of his official account of the Revolution, compiled for the British Government on behalf of their ambassador in Petrograd,

⁶⁹ Walpole, *The Fortress*, pp 771-772.

⁷⁰ Walpole, *Open Letter of an Optimist*, p. 9.

suggests he never did march, romantically joined in song with the multitude.⁷¹ Also, there is already a sense of anxiety about the masses in the Relief of Mafeking section in *The Duchess of Wrexhe* (1914). Despite frequent references during the Chartist sequences of *The Fortress* to the iniquities of inequality, it is hard not to detect here the Walpole who recalls being ‘triumphant’ at the defeat of the General Strike of 1926, while never giving a thought to ‘why there had *been* a strike’ or ‘whether there were not wrongs here that must, and one day would, be righted’.⁷² The General Strike itself is dealt with equally ambiguously in the next book *Vanessa* (1933).

In *The Fortress*, the leader of the Chartists, Feargus O’Connor, is presented as a ridiculously affected figure, and their ranks contain those who, like Kraft’s killer, urge violent direct action. Walpole does engage with the revolutionary moment, the transformative lynchpin of Lukács’s reading of historical fiction, but his responses are as equivocal as the events themselves were often inconclusive. As is commonly accepted, it was through political compromise that England avoided the revolutionary turmoil that gripped Europe in 1848, that and the fact that England experienced its own revolution a century before, something that Walpole would consider with his return to historical fiction in the 1940s.

Judith Paris and *The Fortress* together cover a period of one hundred years, Judith celebrates her 100th birthday at the end of the latter book. Walpole tells the history of the family alongside snippets of English history, which the family either interact with, or simply react to, as if reading about them in the newspapers. The critic James Agate, writing to Walpole in 1940, presumably with regard to Walpole’s return to historical fiction with *The Bright Pavilions* that year, indicates some of the problems he has with the genre. Agate says that historical novels are ‘too fictional’, and that while ‘Biography is a form of history; fiction

⁷¹ Walpole, ‘Hugh Walpole’s Official Account of the First Russian Revolution’, Appendix B in Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, pp. 449-469.

⁷² Walpole, *Open Letter of an Optimist*, p. 10.

never can be'.⁷³ He reacts to the historical novel with the same disbelief, he says, as when a Hollywood film proclaims "'This is Westminster Abbey.'"; History should be history, and fiction 'wholly fictitious'.⁷⁴ Walpole's integration of 'history', and world-historical figures, in the novels, sometimes has the 'Hollywood' approach that Agate finds so unconvincing, as when Judith, at a ball at the Palais-Royal in Paris not long after the Battle of Waterloo, 'half turning, saw standing quite close to her, whom but Mr. Walter Scott?'⁷⁵

As noted, Fredric Jameson suggested Scott wrote costume drama concerned with the binary opposition of good and evil, and that theme also runs through Walpole's story. Adam Herries understands 'from watching even so small an entity as his own family that a battle between good and evil was even there always in progress. His was an age that believed quite definitely in good and evil, in God and the Devil'.⁷⁶ The events that have drawn this observation are Uhland's pursuit and eventual murder of John Herries. The cousins' vendetta reaches its bloody conclusion when John arranges to meet Uhland at remote Skiddaw House back of Blencathra to have things out. John finally overcomes his fear of his nemesis, at which point Uhland shoots him before turning his pistol on himself. While this brings the feud within the Herries to a close, Walpole is already looking to the future. Elizabeth is pregnant with John's child and gives birth to a son Benjamin. On the death of his wife Christabel, Walter's father William, estranged from Walter and Uhland, has remarried to a woman half his age, who has given him a son, Ellis. Meanwhile, Adam and Margaret have a daughter Vanessa.

⁷³ James Agate, 'Letter to Hugh Walpole', in *Ego 5: Again More of the Autobiography of James Agate* (London, Harrap, 1942), p. 50. Subsequent references are to this title.

⁷⁴ Agate, pp.49-50.

⁷⁵ Walpole, *Judith Paris*, p.620.

⁷⁶ Walpole, *The Fortress*, pp. 981-982.

Vanessa

Vanessa (1933), brings Walpole's *Herries Chronicle* up to date. Themes trailed at the end of *The Fortress* are taken up and played out. Vanessa is beautiful, and she and Benjamin are devoted childhood friends, later to be thwarted lovers. Ellis is the culmination of the materialist, realist strand in the Herries family, Benjamin represents the reappearance of the 'Rogue' gene, or as Walpole calls Book I of *Vanessa*, 'The Rascal'. Ellis, strait-laced and correct, is fiercely proud of the Herries family, but chronically aware of its 'Rogue' element. In *The Fortress*, Benjamin earns Ellis's lasting enmity, after being disrespectful and mocking of the older man during a drunken night on the town with Barney Newmark. Walpole is presenting a literary allegory in two characters, Benjamin the romantic rascal, and his counterpart, Ellis the modern, scientific, humourless realist. As the novel might look upon the romance, so Ellis is embarrassed, and a little ashamed, of the illogical, and downright fantastic family roots he has sprung from, a heritage Benjie embraces.

Benjie and Vanessa are to be married, but Vanessa's father Adam dies in a fire and any ceremony is delayed. Benjie gets a local girl pregnant and marries her out of an uncharacteristic sense of responsibility, she later leaves him in charge of their son Tom. Vanessa finally accepts a marriage proposal from Ellis believing she can use his fortune to do good works. Driven by jealousy of Benjie, Ellis gradually goes insane, and in league with two besotted female cousins suggests it is Vanessa who is ill, and attempts to have her confined, in a sequence suggestive of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Benjie rescues Vanessa, and returning to Cumberland they live idyllically together until Ellis, now reverted to a child-like state, is taken ill, and Vanessa returns to nurse him until she herself dies from double pneumonia. The novel continues with Benjie and his two children, Tom his son by his legal wife, and Sally his daughter with Vanessa.

The Arrow of Time

Walpole closes his story in the England of the 1930s, in rural Cumberland, and with a sense of the story coming full-circle. Prior to the last acts of *Vanessa*, he starts to grapple with a philosophy which, if it is to be the message of *The Herries Chronicle*, has been a long time coming, but arguably required the totality of the four novel sequence to make sense. During the late summer of 1903 Vanessa and Benjie are living in the Newlands Valley, they are visited by Mr Benbow the acting vicar, who, being ‘of a mathematical mind’, explains to them that time does not exist.⁷⁷ Benbow’s assertion triggers a written montage of events from *The Herries Chronicle*, as an illustration of the Eternalist philosophy that all existence in time is equally real.⁷⁸

Mr Benbow’s observation, in the book’s own timeline, is slightly in advance of J. M. E. McTaggart who, in his journal article ‘The Unreality of Time’ (1908) and in the chapter ‘Time’ in Volume II of *The Nature of Existence* (1927), aimed to prove, through ‘McTaggart’s Paradox’, that time was a perceptual illusion. McTaggart’s ‘idealist’ philosophy asserts that all material phenomena derive from consciousness. In his *Some Dogmas of Religion* (1906), McTaggart also rejected the existence of God, argued for the immortality of the soul through a form of reincarnation, the plurality of lives, and espoused a doctrine of universal philosophical love, spiritual concerns that seem to occupy the final chapters of *Vanessa*.⁷⁹ Given Walpole’s cultural interactions, his wide reading, and the intellectual circles he somewhat self-consciously found himself in, it seems reasonable to

⁷⁷ Walpole, *Vanessa*, p.1345.

⁷⁸ Mr Benbow’s theories also anticipate J. W. Dunne and his theory of ‘Serialism’, propounding the existence of higher dimensions of time where past, present, and future are continuous, as set out in his book *An Experiment with Time* (1927). For Dunne’s theories as examples of infinite regression see Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Time and J. W. Dunne’, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (London, Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 217-219. Dunne proved culturally influential, to literature if not to science, influencing J. B. Priestley among others: see Victoria Stewart, ‘J. W. Dunne and Literary Culture in the 1930s and 1940s’, *Literature and History*, Vol. 17, issue 2, Nov. 1, 2008, pp. 62-81, at <https://doi.org/10.7227%2FLH.17.2.5> [accessed 06/03/2020].

⁷⁹ Emily Thomas, ‘John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart (1866—1925)’, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (IEP) (ISSN 2161-0002), at <https://www.iep.utm.edu/mctaggart/> [accessed 24/07/2019].

assume that he was aware of McTaggart's work. McTaggart was a teacher and friend of Bertrand Russell and George Edward Moore, whose 'new realism' would be a reaction against their mentor's philosophical idealism. Moore's brand of common sense and plain-speaking philosophy may be seen, at no very great stretch, as the materialist realism to McTaggart's metaphysical romanticism. Russell and Moore were connected to the Bloomsbury Group, through their shared membership of the intellectual society known as the Cambridge Apostles. In his *Principia Ethica* (1903), Moore challenged the notion that a moral property such as goodness could be defined in terms of what is considered natural or compatible, and advocated a sort of intuitive objectivity in order to gain a knowledge of values.⁸⁰ His promotion of the moral supremacy of personal affection, friendship, and the contemplation of beauty, proved particularly influential for the hedonistic philosophy of Bloomsbury.⁸¹

To match his philosophical speculation, in the last section of *Vanessa* (Part IV: The Ghost), Walpole also starts experimenting with technique. Three weeks after the start of the First World War twelve assorted members of the Herries family meet for dinner at the home of Alfred Herries. Alfred makes a speech and the guests perform a ceremony with a candle. Sally, Benjie's daughter, lights the candle and passes it around the table, whereupon each member of the family holds it and wishes the rest good luck. The image of a candle, like a baton in a relay, is then passed between the subsequent episodes. The scene moves on in time and space, to Tom, Sally's half-brother, who is writing to her from the front line. Tom recalls the events of the dinner and the candle ceremony, and writes about their father Benjie. The scene shifts again as a candle is lit in a ruined building in Galicia, where Benjie is helping a Russian Red Cross Otriad, the same unit with some of the characters that Walpole

⁸⁰ Anthony Quinton, 'Moore, George Edward', in *The Fontana Biographical Companion to Modern Thought*, Alan Bullock & R.B. Woodings, eds. (London, Fontana, 1983), pp.527-528.

⁸¹ Leon Edel, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions* (London, Book Club Associates, 1979), pp. 46-47.

follows in *The Dark Forest* (1916). As the candles flare in the makeshift operating theatre, the scene shifts again to a bedroom where Sally and her distant cousin Mary see a searchlight shoot up like a flame into the night sky over London. Back at the Front, Maurice Herries, Alfred's son, sees a flash from a gas-projector in a bombardment, prior to his unit going over the top. He is shot, and before losing consciousness sees Sally holding the flaming candle, which in turn becomes Tom, home on leave with Gordon Newmark, lighting candles in their rooms, when the electric light fuses as they prepare for a night on the town. The pair end up in a sleazy club, where a drunken officer has a sudden fit, cursing the war, before the waiters turn him out. Tom talks to a girl who wonders how they will ever get back to the way things were.

‘We’ll never get back,’ said Tom.

He was watching a man near him who held up, with a rather unsteady hand, a lighter. He pushed at his cigarette with it. The little flame burnt bravely, with a fine uprightness. Then it went out.⁸²

The ‘cutting’ between scenes, using the motif of the candle, is strikingly done. While there is a sense of movement in time the events could, given the earlier observations upon the perceptual nature of reality, just as easily be simultaneous. The technique Walpole uses is a sort of literary equivalent to the cinematic montage, or alternatively the ‘match cut’, an example of which would be the scene where the actor Peter O’Toole, as T. E. Lawrence, blows out a lit match which then cuts to a desert sunrise, in director David Lean’s famous edit for *Lawrence of Arabia* (Horizon Pictures, 1962).

The *Vanessa* storyline follows Benjie to Petrograd prior to the outbreak of revolution in 1917. Benjie asks a new friend, Konrad Mathias, if he believes in God, and the subsequent conversation seems to be back in territory made familiar by a reading of J. M. E. McTaggart.

⁸² Walpole, *The Fortress*, pp. 1401-1411.

Mathias only appears for this short sequence, the revolution breaks out as the conversation comes to a close, the character exists purely to express his philosophy.

‘Then you believe in God?’

‘Of course I do. Only He doesn’t interfere. He sets the scene. You play your part. I’ve been about the world a lot. It’s everywhere the same. Are you a realist or a romantic? If you’re the first it will be the dates, the scientific facts, the large movements, the cold truth that will seem to you to be important. If you’re the second it will be the things behind the facts – what each man does with his soul.’

‘You think man has a soul?’

‘A spiritual life? Of course. It’s the only thing that squares the facts.’

‘Is there a life after death, do you think?’ Benjie asked more eagerly than he had intended.

‘Life? Death? There’s always death. Every man is living and dying all the time. But *physical* death – that’s not important. Men are so thoughtless. And they worry about the wrong things.’⁸³

Here is Walpole’s whole philosophy, realism and the accumulation of facts doesn’t offer any explanation as to life’s purpose, which proves to be simply living a spiritual life and being mindful of what one does with one’s soul.

Sally visits her half-brother Tom in Cumberland and he reads to her from the end of *Orlando* where Rustum the gipsy asks, “‘What is your antiquity and your race, and your possessions compared with this? What do you need with four hundred bedrooms and silver lids on all your dishes, and housemaids dusting?’”⁸⁴ Sally doesn’t understand, and Tom tells her, “‘It means what it says. You must forget things like space and time’”.⁸⁵ Both Tom and Sally have been reading Judith’s journal, and Sally, recalling a particular incident, says “‘It’s as though it happened while we were there’”, Tom declares that this is evidence of Time being a fallacy, and that if Sally lived in the Lake District long enough, she would see how that was true.⁸⁶ Rob Hawkes has discussed how the organisation of time in modernist fiction impacts upon the conventions of narrative, it is notable here that Walpole uses an apparent

⁸³ Walpole, *Vanessa*, p.1414.

⁸⁴ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*, p. 226.

⁸⁵ Walpole, *Vanessa*, p.1454.

⁸⁶ Walpole, *Vanessa*, p.1457.

challenge to conventional readings of temporality to reinforce his narrative sequence rather than destabilise it.⁸⁷

To bring the chronicle full circle, Benjie purchases a caravan and returns to Borrowdale, and then on to Rosthwaite. Reading Judith's book, he too sees in his mind's-eye events from the past, such as Francis 'Rogue' Herries's arrival in the valley with his son David, and events from his own life that convince him that the only things that count in a man's life are the things that touch the spirit.⁸⁸ The books end where they began with a central protagonist essentially withdrawing from the world. Francis 'Rogue' Herries dragged his reluctant family to Borrowdale where he made a poor attempt at arable farming before exhausting his time and health in pursuit of an *amour fou*, Benjie Herries after various adventures, and one great defining love affair, retires to a caravan in the same location and a life of quasi-philosophical musing. Given the tangential engagement with world history experienced by his characters, Walpole seems to be offering the same sort of enigmatic conclusion to the chronicle as that contained in Voltaire's *Candide* (1759). The circular theme of history repeating itself strengthens the speculative theories about time that have emerged in *Vanessa*, it also emphasises the strong strand of nostalgia that runs through the novels. While Rogue Herries's motives for moving to Cumberland are never explored (there is a suggestion he is fleeing creditors), future members of the family display a desire to gravitate to the ancestral home with varying degrees of intensity. Judith spends much of her adult life yearning to return to her cottage in Watendlath, Adam Herries turns his back on politics to write fairy stories under Catbells, Benjie's son Tom ultimately experiences a mystical, and fatal, apotheosis stepping off Scafell in the fog, and Benjie returns to enjoy an itinerant existence around the Lakes in his caravan. If there is a message in *The Herries Chronicle* perhaps it

⁸⁷ Hawkes, pp. 3-4, & pp.7-8.

⁸⁸ Walpole, *Vanessa*, p. 1486.

owes less to Voltaire than to Frank L. Baum's dictum that there is no place like home. As a nod to the Rising City of youth, Benjie's daughter Sally marries a Frenchman and joins a group working for world peace in Berlin, so perhaps Walpole saw an alternative internationalist mindset emerging from a new generation.

Herries redux

The entire *Herries* sequence of four novels, completed in 1933, were issued as a single volume in 1939 on the suggestion of Harold Macmillan.⁸⁹ Walpole planned another four-volume chronicle as a prequel to the first Herries saga. Starting in Elizabethan times with *The Bright Pavilions* (1940), the story then moved on to cover the British Civil War with *Katherine Christian* (1944). Walpole died in 1941 with *Katherine Christian* incomplete and no notes for its completion extant. His executors felt that there was enough of this last novel to publish posthumously, and although it is quite substantial it must be noted that the hostilities have barely broken out as the book ends. *The Bright Pavilions* and *Katherine Christian* are more what one might suppose historical fiction to be. The plots are closely attuned to actual events, and while Walpole's characters have their own individual adventures the books are structured around the passage of these events. History in *The Herries Chronicle* is presented as 'noises off', the protagonists of this later brace of books are its more closely-aligned eye-witnesses.

The Bright Pavilions concerns two Herries brothers Nicholas and Robin, Nicholas a down-to-earth giant, and Robin his spiritually-minded sibling. Nicholas is a loyal servant of Queen Elizabeth I, Robin while no less loyal is drawn for reasons which are never elucidated to the Catholic faith, and the fate of Mary Stuart. Nicholas triggers a feud with one Phillip Irvine who uses his growing status in Elizabeth's court to persecute Robin as a means of revenge on

⁸⁹ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 402.

Nicholas. While this vendetta drives the narrative, the protagonists are shown to be close to world historical events, culminating in the execution of the Scottish Queen.

The plot of *Katherine Christian* mirrors that of its predecessor. *Katherine Christian* introduces the Garland family, cousins of Nicholas Herries, and two more brothers, Rashleigh and Peter. Rashleigh Garland goes to the court of Charles I where he becomes a close confidant of the King, Peter is a Puritan already filled with reforming zeal before he is inspired by his meeting, and subsequent friendship, with Oliver Cromwell. Another cousin, Frederick Courthope, is introduced as the brothers' nemesis, as Phillip Irvine was for Nicholas and Robin. It is unclear whether Walpole intends this repetition to reinforce his theory of the persistence, or survival, of events through time, history effectively repeating itself, or whether he was simply recycling plots as he did with *Maradick at Forty*. The novels might be said to be in a dialogue with each other, and with the later-set Herries chronicle.

Rogue, and Judith, Adam, Vanessa, and Benjie, in *The Herries Chronicle*, were characters of middling importance, experiencing the impact of history rather than making it. That suggests a view of history in the twentieth-century whereby people confront a growing sense of insignificance in the face of world events. Reading *The Bright Pavilions* and *Katherine Christian*, one is aware that Walpole is promoting his characters until they are almost world-historical figures themselves. *The Bright Pavilions* and *Katherine Christian* were written against a backdrop of another World War, and the Herries family, identifying themselves with England, clearly do not consider themselves to be insignificant. In *Vanessa* (1933) Barney Newmark explained something of the Herries' world-view, a view expressed more comprehensively by Rashleigh Garland in *Katherine Christian*:

'About our family – the Herries family. We are very ordinary but we are the microcosm of England. If you love England but do not know why, study us. If equally you hate England but do not know why, study us. If you care for money, we have it – in moderation. If for poetry, we have that too. If for achievement, we have *that* – in moderation. If for desire, that will never be fulfilled – here too you can study

it in us. If you are outside normality we can give you for companion any kind of perversity. But for normality – perfect English normality – there is no family like us.’⁹⁰

In the ‘Dedicatory Letter’ to *The Bright Pavilions*, Walpole defends his grim depiction of the Elizabethan period, ‘For then, as now, as the men and women of England were fighting a desperate and tenacious enemy. Then as now they were fighting for their lives’.⁹¹ He goes on to say, ‘The Elizabethan Age was ferocious, cruel, superstitious, greedy and courageous’.⁹² This echoes Larry Delaney in *The Joyful Delaneys* (1938), who declared that modern Britain was ‘rough, hazardous, cynical like all new worlds’, not ‘young, idealistic, full of hope’, but ‘Fierce, vulgar, scornful’ like ‘new worlds’ of the past.⁹³

Some of the uncertainty accompanying the time in which it was written comes through intact in *The Bright Pavilions*, partly because Walpole was not noted for rewriting. The composition of the book coincided with the threat of war, the apparent reprieve through the Munich Agreement of 1938, and finally the declaration of war in 1939. Walpole’s hopes for the avoidance of conflict may explain what appears to be an early conciliatory attempt to understand both sides. Near the beginning of the book, Walpole considers the young gallants celebrating the restoration of English power under Elizabeth, ‘because the future belonged to them’, a resonant phrase, and all the more so when Walpole follows it with another insight, ‘So, three hundred and fifty years later, a great body of young patriots of another country would once again feel the same exultation!’⁹⁴ Shortly after, there is an horrific description of the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of 1572, the writing of which may have coincided with reports of massacres carried out by the Gestapo and SD in occupied Poland as part of Hitler’s Operation Tannenberg. Overall, it is unwise to read too much allegory into the book, as it

⁹⁰ Walpole, *Katherine Christian* (London, Macmillan, 1944), p. 296. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹¹ Walpole, ‘A Dedicatory Letter’ (to Ronald Storrs), in *The Bright Pavilions* (Far Thrupp, Alan Sutton, 1995), unpaginated. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁹² Walpole, ‘A Dedicatory Letter’, *The Bright Pavilions*, unpaginated.

⁹³ Walpole, *The Joyful Delaneys*, pp. 292-296.

⁹⁴ Walpole, *The Bright Pavilions*, p. 43.

was completed in October 1939 during the period known as the ‘Phoney War’, when there was only limited military action in Western Europe. Walpole’s main concern was with the actual religious strife in sixteenth-century England, and he steers a careful path, displaying patriotic support for protestant Elizabeth, while showing sympathy for the Catholic cause, particularly in his depiction of the martyrdom of Edmund Campion and the execution of Mary Stuart.

Walpole’s instincts about his market proved to be as strong as ever. *The Bright Pavilions*, the last of his completed novels published before his death, sold twenty-eight thousand copies in the first three months following publication. This second saga may have proved to be as successful as the first if he had survived to complete it.

Influence and affluence

When considering Perry Anderson’s essay on historical fiction, it was noted that in the 1920s the genre no longer combined the commercial appeal and aesthetic status it had once commanded. Elizabeth Steele claims that the genre had been neglected following the deaths of writers Walpole admired, like Robert Louis Stevenson and Francis Marion Crawford.⁹⁵ Closer scrutiny of the market suggests that the historical romance was hardly in hiatus, and attracted writers across a wide spectrum of styles, from Ford Madox Ford and his *The Fifth Queen* trilogy (1906-1908), to the prolific popular author Baroness Orczy. Young literary-historical novelists like Georgette Heyer and Naomi Mitchison were active in the genre throughout the 1920s and 1930s.⁹⁶ Despite this evidence, in his introduction to *The Waverley Pageant* (1932), Walpole also cites the falling-out-of-favour of the historical novel over the

⁹⁵ Steele, p. 116.

⁹⁶ The health or otherwise of the historical novel in the early decades of the century seems very much a matter of opinion. Jason Harding notes two thousand historical novels published in 1902 in England alone. Jason Harding ‘The Swan Song of Historical Romance: *The Fifth Queen* Trilogy’, in *International Ford Madox Ford Studies*, Vol. 3, History and Representation in Ford Madox Ford’s Writings (2004), p. 112, at <https://www-jstor-org.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/stable/44871232> [accessed 29/08/2020].

previous twenty years. Walpole declares Maurice Hewlett's novel about Mary Queen of Scots, *The Queen's Quair* (1903), to be the last of the 'defiant' historical novels in the literature, whatever that may mean, and sees nothing but compromise in Mitchison's 'modern colloquialism'.⁹⁷ Presumably the 'defiance' that Walpole detects in Hewlett signifies a traditional treatment of the historical novel, compared to Mitchison's revisionist employment of philosophy and sexual politics.

The demise, or at least severe ill-health, of the historical novel since the turn of the century, as presented by Walpole and Steele, is a scenario designed to support the particular arguments they go on to present. In *The Waverley Pageant*, Walpole is making the case for Walter Scott being the equal of the novelists Fielding, Austen, and Thackeray, and not simply a writer working in a genre which is no longer fashionable. Walpole sees the falling-out-of-favour of the historical novel as due to the fast pace of the modern world creating history day-to-day, and the modern novel becoming determinedly realistic. Steele charts the decline of the genre in order to claim the success of *Rogue Herries* to be responsible for a surge of historical fiction through the 1930s, citing the appearance of novels in the USA such as Hervey Allen's *Anthony Adverse* (1933), Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), and Kathleen Winsor's *Forever Amber* (1944), as evidence of this renewal.⁹⁸ Steele rhetorically, and perhaps a little hopefully, asks if "“escape fiction”", and *Rogue Herries* in particular, while aided by the prevailing mood surrounding the Depression and World War II, 'single-handedly turned the tide against the "intellectual fiction" of the 1920s', which she suggests experienced its own lacuna, 'except in France', for a further three decades.⁹⁹ This is not a very convincing argument; intellectual fiction by any definition seems to have enjoyed a healthy continuity during and beyond the publishing success that was *Rogue Herries*.

⁹⁷ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, p. xxxvi.

⁹⁸ Steele, p.116.

⁹⁹ Steele, p. 117.

Debate about its influence aside, *Rogue Herries* was a commercial and critical success, and, in March 1931 Frederick Macmillan wrote to Walpole to tell him that, a year after publication, the book was still selling hundreds of copies every week.¹⁰⁰ An expensive 15 shillings leather-bound keepsake edition was especially popular in Cumberland, the cover price perhaps justified by the ability of the binding to repel that county's interminable rain.¹⁰¹ In the USA the book made the best-seller list for 1930, as *Wintersmoon* had done in 1928. The sequel to *Rogue Herries*, *Judith Paris* (1931), sold its initial run of twenty thousand copies within a fortnight of its appearance.¹⁰² The collected edition of all four Herries novels, *The Herries Chronicle* (1939), sold sixty thousand copies prior to publication.¹⁰³ For many years the *Herries* books were the only part of Walpole's considerable output that remained in print, something that Walpole had anticipated, albeit with a modest qualification. Working in Hollywood in 1935, he writes in his journal that fifty years on he expects these books to be still read locally, whereas he will only merit 'a small footnote to my period in literary history' unless he is discovered by some investigation into 'minor authors'.¹⁰⁴

This chapter has considered Hugh Walpole's historical fiction as the rural strand of his project to examine England in the first three decades of the twentieth century, clearly by starting his narrative two hundred years earlier he went somewhat off-message. The final chapter of this study will complete the examination of Walpole's plan to address the city, the rural countryside, and the provinces, by studying his provincial novels, set in the fictional Cathedral city of Polchester.

¹⁰⁰ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 321.

¹⁰¹ Steele, p. 122.

¹⁰² Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 327.

¹⁰³ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 416.

¹⁰⁴ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 362.

PART THREE

Into the Past, Historical Fiction, Literary Scandal and Pageantry

Chapter Seven: Reports of the death of the author are greatly exaggerated

In the last chapter it was noted that despite his prolific output and commercial success Hugh Walpole only ever expected to occupy a small footnote in literary history. This self-deprecation was likely to have been based upon solid pragmatism, Walpole frequently alluded to the apparent ‘disappearance’ of authors such as Francis Marion Crawford, who had died in 1909 just as Walpole’s first novel was being published, and whom Walpole had read avidly and admired. In the event Walpole does occupy a small, anecdotal, footnote in literary history, but not for his contribution to fiction.

No more cakes and ale?

The so-called ‘scandal’, a word that requires some unpicking, surrounding the publication of Somerset Maugham’s *Cakes and Ale* (1930), took place twenty years into Walpole’s successful literary career and eleven years prior to the conclusion of that career with the author’s death. It occurred at a time when the author’s standing seemed to have reached a pinnacle of achievement with the publication of two hugely successful books, *Wintersmoon* (1928), and *Rogue Herries* (1930), the timing may not have been entirely coincidental.

In Maugham’s novel the narrator, Ashenden, is approached by a literary acquaintance, Alroy Kear, who having been commissioned to write a biography of deceased novelist Edward Driffield by the man’s widow, seeks to pick Ashenden’s brains about Driffield’s early life, and particularly about Rosie, his wife by his first marriage. Ashenden knew Driffield before he was famous, and the book alternates Kear’s manoeuvring to obtain Ashenden’s recollections, with the latter’s reliving of the past. Driffield was widely assumed to be based upon Thomas Hardy, who had died in 1928. Both Hardy and the fictional Driffield had much younger second wives: Hardy his secretary, Driffield his nurse. Like Hardy, Driffield had a

rural upbringing, wrote about rustic characters, and is recorded as receiving the Order of Merit on his journey to becoming the Grand Old Man of English Letters. The public face of the scandal was the apparent slur against Hardy in the characterisation of Drifffield, an intention which Maugham strenuously denied. What devastated Hugh Walpole was that the character of Alroy Kear was clearly based upon him.

George Orwell in *Inside the Whale* (1940), wrote that in the 1920s ‘Gibbs and Walpole were the gods of the lending libraries, there was a cult of cheeriness and manliness, beer and cricket’.¹ Orwell was a devotee of Maugham, and when he wrote those words he may have been referencing Ashenden, and his memory of how Alroy Kear began his writing career at a time ‘when men of letters, to show their virility, drank beer and played cricket’.² Although Maugham makes Kear something of an athlete, which Walpole never was, Ashenden’s dissection of his fellow writer highlights many traits the fictional character shared with the living one. A physical description of Kear is recognisably close to that of Walpole, and this is followed by a detailing of the charm offensive he pursued in the early days of his career as a young novelist. Ashenden notes that Kear wrote flattering letters to established novelists seeking advice, and courted an unnamed great artist as a mentor; Walpole was known to be a protégé of Henry James. Kear is assiduous in his cultivation of reviewers both friendly and hostile, and is modestly deprecating of his own work. Ashenden even notes that Kear’s novels switched from studies of the aristocracy, when this became unfashionable, to the ‘spiritual conflicts’ of the middle-classes, and pays tribute to his success on the lecture circuit as a public speaker.³ The caricature is especially effective because Kear’s foibles and failings are reviewed with no apparent animosity, Kear is presented as shallow and manipulative but

¹ Orwell, *Inside the Whale*, p. 25.

² Maugham, *Cakes and Ale*, p.11.

³ Maugham, *Cakes and Ale*, pp. 10-12.

still capable of earning Ashenden's 'considerable affection'.⁴ Ashenden admires Kear's rise to prominence because he has 'achieved so considerable a position on so little talent'.⁵ When challenged by Walpole, Maugham defended himself in the same terms that subsequently went into print in prefaces to future editions of the novel:

I am told that two or three writers thought themselves aimed at in the character of Alroy Kear. They were under a misapprehension. This character was a composite portrait: I took the appearance from one writer, the obsession with good society from another, the heartiness from a third, the pride in athletic prowess from a fourth, and a great deal from myself.⁶

Walpole appeared to accept the explanation. In a letter to his publisher Harold Macmillan in October, he reports that he had been worried but had got over it. He says that Maugham claimed to have intended a mixture of the poet and dramatist John Drinkwater, the novelist Gilbert Frankau, and Maugham himself, but Walpole conceded he could detect a 'tinge' of himself.⁷ In the preface to the Modern Library Edition of *Cakes and Ale* (1950), with Walpole dead for nine years, Maugham finally came clean:

Hugh Walpole then was the most prominent member of that body of writers who attempt by seizing every opportunity to keep in the public eye, by getting on familiar terms with critics so that their books may be favourably reviewed, by currying favour wherever it can serve them, to attain a success that their merit scarcely deserves. They attempt by push and pull to make up for their lack of talent. It was true that I had had Hugh Walpole in mind when I devised the character to whom I gave the name of Alroy Kear.⁸

Walpole had considered Maugham to be a close friend for twenty years. The attack was unlikely to have been motivated by professional jealousy as Maugham was a hugely successful writer. One can only assume that Maugham's irritation had been piqued, and he

⁴ Maugham, *Cakes and Ale*, p. 8.

⁵ Maugham, *Cakes and Ale*, pp. 8-19.

⁶ Maugham, 'Author's preface', *Cakes and Ale*, p. 3.

⁷ Walpole: Correspondence with Macmillan and Co.: British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54959, Vol. CLXXIV (1930-1933), item 36.

⁸ Somerset Maugham, 'Introduction by W. Somerset Maugham' *Cakes and Ale*, Modern Library Edition (New York, Random House, 1950), p. ix.

decided to take Walpole down a peg or two, at a time when he was basking in critical success, precisely because he could.

The story of the *Cakes and Ale* scandal still surfaces today from time to time, barely developed in tone from its treatment in Alec Waugh's piece, 'The Nail in the Coffin', written for an edition of *Harper's Magazine* in 1953, following the appearance of Rupert Hart-Davis's biography of Walpole the previous year. As literary anecdote, the story has hubristic overtones, and in reviving it the teller can allege, as Waugh does with dramatic finality, that '*Cakes and Ale* ruined the last ten years of Walpole's life', and the somewhat more accurate observation, 'Walpole will be recalled not as the author of the Herries chronicle but as a minor character in one of the best light novels'.⁹

One thing the incident illustrates is the self-importance of literary coteries. Thomas Hardy was recognisable as a national treasure, whereas it is likely that the portrait of Walpole would have been apparent only to those who knew him well. Robert Calder writes that the excitement over the attack occupied the denizens of 'private circles, literary cliques, and London clubs', and this seems to be the more likely audience rather than any general readership.¹⁰ Petty back-biting among the literati can hardly be said to have a major impact on the general public. While Stan Gebler Davies records that the "SCANDAL OF JAMES JOYCE'S ULYSSES..." made the front page of *The Sporting Times* (known as the *Pink Un*) in 1922, Walpole's depiction as Alroy Kear in *Cakes and Ale* seems more likely to have only exercised fellow members of the chattering classes.¹¹

⁹ Alec Waugh, 'The Nail in the Coffin', *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. 207, Issue 1238, July 1, 1953 (New York, Harper), pp. 35-37, Periodicals Archive Online, at <http://search.proquest.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/docview/1301547322/accountid+14697> [accessed 01/08/2019].

¹⁰ Robert Lorin Calder, *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom* (New York, Doubleday, 1973), p. 175.

¹¹ Stan Gebler Davies, *James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist* (London, Abacus, 1977), p.214.

Walpole alludes to *Cakes and Ale*, and the theme of betrayal, both in prefaces to some of his books, and occasionally in the fiction that appeared after 1930, so clearly the incident continued to prey upon him. In *John Cornelius* (1937), Walpole's narrator warns a fellow-writer Simeon Rose (Walpole again), that he is likely to appear in the cynical Archie Bertrand's next novel, Bertrand being a portrait of Maugham. Rose declares that he isn't concerned as he and Bertrand are great friends, "That makes no difference" is the reply.¹²

Never glad confident morning again?

What seems now to be no more than a squall in a literary teacup, and hardly something that merits being described as a 'scandal', clearly resonated with literary London at the time, and continued to do so with those who, like Alec Waugh, could remember the principal players involved, so that its faint echoes can even be heard today. A possible explanation for the story's persistence, beyond that of *schadenfreude* and the fact that it makes an amusing anecdote, is that later commentators were desperate to find a reason for Hugh Walpole's disappearance from literary history. Through the lens of the *Cakes and Ale* 'scandal', Walpole manages to live on in a semi-fictionalised form, as one of the literary undead, haunting the decades before the outbreak of the Second World War, a spectral presence dispatched not by modernism but by a fellow traditionally-minded writer. Anthony West, writing in the *New Yorker* in 1953, suggested that in the normal course of events, but for *Cakes and Ale* and with a clear field, Walpole might have expected recognition in the Honours List, and his reputation consolidated with 'a wave of Library Editions, collected works, and cheap reprints, as a Grand Old Man of the English novel'.¹³ West acknowledges that Walpole did receive his knighthood in 1937, but says that he could no longer be

¹² Walpole, *John Cornelius*, p.341.

¹³ Anthony West, 'Waiting for Mr Right', *New Yorker*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 27, August 23, 1952 (New York, Condé Nast, 1925-), p. 73.

considered a serious literary figure. Walpole was only fifty-three when he received his knighthood, he already had his Library editions, collected works, and cheap reprints. West's own father H. G. Wells was in his seventies then, and but for a declining reputation might have made a serious contender for Grand Old Man of English Letters status, which in fact was to be accorded to Maugham himself in due course.¹⁴

Life's rich pageant

Whatever the emotional aftermath of *Cakes and Ale*, Walpole continued to enjoy a high public profile. His books enjoyed healthy sales, he had a stint writing in Hollywood, and he was knighted for services to literature in 1937. Elizabeth Steele sees a falling-off of quality in Walpole's writing, post *Cakes and Ale*, due to a crisis of confidence, an assessment which only stands scrutiny if one accepts her judgement on the relative merits of the earlier books compared to the later ones. The slightly cynical, harder edge, which appears in some of the later titles, at the expense of earlier sentimentality, might be seen as an improvement. *Judith Paris*, which Walpole was writing when *Cakes and Ale* appeared, garnered just as much praise as *Rogue Herries*, with some critics and readers preferring it to the earlier novel.¹⁵

1932 was an especially busy year: Walpole was writing *Vanessa*, the fourth Herries novel; an anthology, *The Waverley Pageant*, was published to coincide with the centenary of Scott's death, for which Walpole wrote a biographical essay, and critical introductions to the chosen extracts; the third Herries novel *The Fortress* appeared; and he published his autobiographical fragment *The Apple Trees*. Walpole also contributed *A Letter to a Modern Novelist* to a series for the Woolfs' Hogarth Press, a satire in which he recommends the reading of

¹⁴ Calder, *W. Somerset Maugham and the Quest for Freedom*, p. 263.

¹⁵ Steele, p. 123.

Trollope, as he gently chides a fictional young writer friend who has written a formless novel in which nothing happens.¹⁶

1935 saw the publication of *The Inquisitor*, the third of Walpole's provincial novels set in Polchester, another of his 'non- trilogies' intended to accompany the London Novels and the rural Herries cycle. This sequence began with *The Cathedral* (1922), a Trollopian tale of clerical in-fighting dealing with the arrival of an intruder, Canon Ronder, and his attempts to usurp the power and influence of Archdeacon Brandon. Ronder is an agent of chaos, deliberately setting out to upset the status quo to impose his own will. Walpole was working through some mixed feelings about the established church, that he had first aired in *The Captives* (1920), and his antipathy to the Cathedral City of Durham where he had experienced an unhappy time at school. Walpole prevaricated about the influence of Trollope, claiming he took more from Meade Falkner's *The Nebuly Coat* (1903), but Trollope's Barchester seems an equally important source.¹⁷

Not only does Walpole repeat his favoured technique of setting an intruder, in the shape of Canon Ronder, to disrupt a previously stable environment, he introduces a flavour of the carnivalesque in terms of the rigid social structure of Polchester being turned upside-down. While Archdeacon Brandon's daughter becomes engaged to young Lord St. Leath, his son elopes with the daughter of slobbish publican Samuel Hogg, and his wife runs away with a local preacher. The coming turmoil is trumpeted early in the book, when Brandon, observing a circus procession through the town, suffers the indignity of having his top hat snatched from his head by one of the elephants.

The second Polchester novel was *Harmer John* (1926), in which a Scandinavian callisthenics tutor descends upon Polchester, and makes the mistake of turning from

¹⁶ Walpole, *A Letter to a Modern Novelist* (London, Hogarth, 1932).

¹⁷ Walpole, 'Preface', *The Cathedral*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), pp. viii-ix. Subsequent references are to this edition.

preaching the benefits of a healthy body to trying to tackle social injustice. Samuel Hogg, the thuggish landlord of the local pub from *The Cathedral*, has bought up cheap housing in the run-down Seatown area of Polchester, and reinvented himself as a slumlord. When ‘Harmer John’, the colloquial rendering of his real name Hjalmar Johanson, challenges the townsfolk to do something about the conditions in Seatown, Hogg mobilises the seedier element among his tenants and Johanson is killed. Johanson is presented as a naïve but principled ‘holy fool’, not unlike Prince Myshkin in Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* (1874). Stricken with shame over what has happened, the townspeople do finally combine to address the social wrongs in Polchester. After Johanson’s death there are reports that he has been seen again, a perennially-smiling Christ-like figure resurrected to watch over the town. One of Johanson’s friends, the writer Miss Midgeley, revisits Polchester in 1913 to see the new dwellings erected on the site of the old slums, and the unveiling of a plaque celebrating Johanson’s crusade. She finds the new housing ‘hideously ugly’ and notes somewhat sarcastically, ‘All so clean, so neat and comfortable. Every little house with its bath (h. and c.) and its excellent sanitary arrangement’ and the inhabitants, ‘all reformed with clean faces and clean collars’.¹⁸ Walpole is still equivocal about the benefits of progress, and Miss Midgeley seems to share Harry Trojan’s qualms from *The Wooden Horse* (1909), when he learned of the plans to redevelop the traditional seafront dwellings at Pendragon.

Given Walpole’s enthusiasm for Dostoyevsky, the title of the final Polchester novel, *The Inquisitor*, seems likely to have been inspired by the famous sequence in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) where Ivan recites his prose poem ‘The Grand Inquisitor’ to his brother Alyosha. In Ivan’s story, an Inquisitor in fifteenth-century Seville explains to the returned Christ that they have solved the problem of free will, which made the people unhappy and

¹⁸ Walpole, *Harmer John*, The Cumberland Edition (London, Macmillan, 1934), pp. 478–479. Subsequent references are to this edition.

confused, by founding religion upon blind faith, in miracles, and mystery, and the unquestioned authority of the Church. The Inquisitor in Walpole's novel is some sort of spirit entity, leaking through from one of those other worlds that Walpole's fiction insists exist in tangent to our own. His role appears to be to challenge the guilty consciences of the townsfolk. First glimpsed as a shadowy figure in a doorway, depicted in a local artist's sketch of the Cathedral, he haunts people's dreams, manifesting as a thin man with a broken neck, seen leading a procession bearing a corpse. This creation seems to have had its origins in a nightmare Walpole recounted to his journal.¹⁹

There are two main plots to *The Inquisitor*, the disappearance of Stephen Furze, a much-hated local moneylender who has most of the town in his grip, and the controversy over the plans to stage a local historical pageant. While the novel shares many macabre elements with Walpole's genre titles, the mystery of the moneylender's disappearance, and presumed murder, never settles into a conventional 'whodunnit'. There are various candidates accused of the deed, and it is a measure of Walpole's skill that when it turns out to be the likeliest, Furze's brother Mike, the reveal avoids anti-climax. The other plot-note, the inclusion of a pageant, is a particularly topical touch. These celebrations were very much a part of English life, both in the towns and the provinces, from around the turn of the century.²⁰

Writers responded to early twentieth-century 'pageant fever' either by writing for them, or writing about them. E. M. Forster wrote 'The Abinger Pageant' for the Surrey village of West Hackhurst where he lived in 1934, and 'England's Pleasant Land' for the Dorking and Leith Hill Preservation Society in 1938. T. S. Eliot contributed a scene and choruses for *The*

¹⁹ Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, pp. 340-341.

²⁰ Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alexander Hutton & Paul Readman (2019), 'History taught in the pageant way': education and historical performance in twentieth-century Britain', *History of Education*, Journal of the History of Education Society, Volume 48, issue 2, pp. 156-179, Taylor & Francis Online, at DOI: [10.1080/0046760X.2018.1516811](https://doi.org/10.1080/0046760X.2018.1516811) [accessed 10/08/2019]. See also: *The Redress of the Past: Historical Pageants of Britain*, AHRC-funded project, online at <http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/> [accessed 10/08/2019].

Rock (1934), a pageant play commissioned for the benefit of churches in the London diocese, and followed this up with his verse-play *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), commissioned for the Canterbury Festival, and dealing with the killing of Thomas Becket. Walpole used lines from *The Rock* as the epigraph to *The Joyful Delaneys* (1938). Virginia Woolf made a village pageant the centrepiece of her final novel *Between the Acts* (1941).

Joshua D. Esty in ‘Amnesia in the Fields: Late Modernism, Late Imperialism, and the English Pageant-Play’ sees the pageant play in the 1930s as a reflection of national introspection, anticipating post-imperial nostalgia. Within the modernism represented by Forster, Eliot, and Woolf’s contributions, Esty discerns a shift away from sophisticated metropolitan exclusivity, to embrace a communal art form of domestic ritual. The pageant can embrace both the local, re-enacting historical events on the very soil where they took place, and the national, by placing those events in a wider context.

The key to the genre, then, is that it presents a chronological series of episodes precisely to project the absence of historical change. The typical pageant managed to represent hundreds of years of English history by suggesting that all the important things had stayed the same, by dissolving linear time into the seductive continuity of national tradition.²¹

With at least one function of pageant performance being to foster a sense of national unity, Esty highlights the balancing act the pageant performed in the England of the 1930s, as a counter to the toxic nationalism emerging on the continent. While the pageant draws on certain performative folk traditions, it was itself a new genre of popular entertainment, and the involvement of Forster, Eliot, and Woolf, is another example of modernism engaging with popular culture in the public sphere. Walpole’s use of a pageant as a plot device seems less surprising, in fact he is precisely the author one would expect to have been called upon to

²¹ Joshua D. Esty, ‘Amnesia in the Fields: Late Modernism, Late Imperialism, and the English Pageant-Play’, *ELH*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2002, pp. 245–276, p. 249, *JSTOR*, at www.jstor.org/stable/30032018 [accessed 11/08/2019].

write one, given his reinvention as an historical novelist, his involvement in the (Cumbrian) community, and his flair for self-publicity.²²

The Inquisitor is set twenty years after the final pages of *Harmer John*, the ugly new houses that Miss Midgeley despised, that in 1913 replaced the old Seatown slums, have become slums in their turn. Polchester society is divided into three main castes, ‘the Cathedral set, the Upper Ten’, then the middle-class tradesmen of the Town, then ‘the Outlaws, the dominants of Seatown, the riff-raff’.²³ The forthcoming pageant divides the town on class lines. The tradesfolk of the Town, despite the promise of increased trade from tourists, resent that the pageant’s organising committee is almost exclusively drawn from the upper set, and see it as a vanity project for a few individuals. The unemployed inhabitants of Seatown believe that the money being spent on the pageant should be used to improve their living conditions. Seatown throws up a charismatic rabble-rouser in Tom Caul, one of Walpole’s muscle-bound he-men, who nevertheless is an inspired orator urging violent direct action, ‘He called himself a Communist, having as his only desire a general robbing, burning, destruction of all and sundry. Behind his wildness there was a certain dim philosophy.’²⁴

If the purpose of a pageant is to bolster civic pride and unity, Walpole subverts this reading from the outset, highlighting ‘the actual reality of the peril that lies always beneath the thin crust of conventional conduct’.²⁵ The Polchester pageant highlights social division and, in the person of Tom Caul, the dangers of populism. Caul doesn’t offer an alternative to social injustice, he is simply another destroyer, with his target the perceived moneyed elite, in the

²² The City of Carlisle hosted a Great Historical Pageant in August of 1928 (when Walpole was travelling in the south of England [Hart-Davis pp. 291-292]), as one of the sequences involved the siege of the city by the Jacobite army of Charles Edward Stuart in 1745 it seems a shame Walpole should have missed it, given he was engaged with writing *Rogue Herries* at the time. The pageant seems to have been geared to promote the ‘ascendancy of British identity’ which is interesting given the prominence of that theme in British historical fiction including Walpole’s own. See <http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/featured-pageants/grand-celebration-border-history-carlisle-great-historical-pageant/> [accessed 11/08/2019].

²³ Walpole, *The Inquisitor*, pp. 69-70.

²⁴ Walpole, *The Inquisitor*, p. 141.

²⁵ Walpole, *The Inquisitor*, p. 293.

shape of the Cathedral set. Walpole worked on *The Inquisitor* through 1934, a year which had started with a huge rally for Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the UK, and that saw Adolf Hitler become Führer of Germany in August. *The Inquisitor* is a better candidate for a Parable of the Time than *A Prayer for My Son* (1936), and *The Sea Tower* (1939), which followed; while it may not contain a dominant character taking on the role of a powerful dictator, the thuggish Caul, with his 'dim philosophy' and his gift for oratory, is a prototype 'Mussolini at the very least'.²⁶ There is also a suggestion that Caul is being manipulated by others, more out of mischief than through a sinister agenda, as his chief instigator is the floridly camp Romney, the designer of the pageant, a man with a foot amongst both the Cathedral set and Seatown, where Walpole hints he trawls for rough trade.²⁷

Following a double murder, Seatown vigilantes patrol the streets wielding clubs, there is disruption of the Pageant's final day, and the book ends with a reading of the Riot Act, the torching of the library, and more killings. Finally, the corpse of Stephen Furze is found, and Mike Furze confesses before committing suicide. Something like peace returns to the town, and the mysterious Inquisitor is seen no more, although there is still a suggestion that a spectre is haunting Polchester.

The theme of carnivalesque disruption, first introduced by Walpole with the Trellis dance from *Maradick at Forty* (1910) and *Portrait of a Man with Red Hair* (1925), and resurfacing in *The Cathedral*, is given full rein in *The Inquisitor*. The pageant, a formal celebration imposed upon the town, becomes the agency of a period of anarchy more akin to Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of carnival, that of a world turned upside down, with a reversal of the accepted social order.

As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the

²⁶ Walpole, *The Inquisitor*, p. 516.

²⁷ Walpole, *The Inquisitor*, pp. 335-336.

suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.²⁸

In this new environment, the spirit-manifestation of the Inquisitor and the agitator Caul are the Lords of Misrule. Bakhtin says that a writer need not be aware of the links and branches of the 'carnivalistic generic tradition' to assimilate its conventions, although an awareness by the scholar of the traditions or sources of the particular writer's '*generic contacts*' is an aid to understanding.²⁹ Whether Walpole was aware of the carnivalistic tradition or not is immaterial, *The Inquisitor* is suffused with his version of the gothic macabre which is his generic contact, and many of the features of the carnival genre, social disruption, death, fire, as indicated by Bakhtin, are present.³⁰ Social conventions are overturned, with Penny Marlowe, the teenage daughter of the local rector, starting a love-affair, which stops just short of consummation, with Lampiron the sculptor who is fifty years her senior. Meanwhile the curate, the Reverend Bird, befriends, and later marries, Elizabeth the daughter of the moneylender Furze. The formal, staged, sequences of the Polchester pageant are frequently disturbed, through confusion between performers and audience, due to infiltration from Seatown, and the apparent presence of participants from the spirit world. The attempted disruption of the final day of the pageant by Caul and his agitators comes to naught, but is rapidly followed by a night-time riot. The sculptor Lampiron, who portrays Arden the medieval Black Bishop defending the cathedral in the pageant, repeats his role in real life, trying to protect the cathedral after the Seatown mob has torched the library, losing his life in the process.

²⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 10.

²⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Theory and History of Literature, Volume 8*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 157.

³⁰ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 126.

Another theme of this novel is what might be termed historical persistence. Just as Walpole challenged the conventional ‘arrow of time’ in *Vanessa*, by suggesting the simultaneity of ‘historical’ events, so the Polchester pageant seems to open a window in time, allowing seepage from the past. Many of the performers in the pageant tableaux ‘see’ the events they are portraying as they must have happened, they become the characters they are supposed to represent, and Polchester’s population is temporarily swelled as previous generations establish a spirit-bridgehead in the present. This survival of historical personality is a feature of all three Polchester novels. The presence of Arden the Black Bishop seems to haunt Archdeacon Brandon in *The Cathedral*, and in *Harmer John* the narrator recalls *A Beleaguered City* (1879) by Mrs Oliphant (Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant), which features ‘the invasion of a certain town by the souls of the departed’, and has an experience in which he feels ‘pressed in upon by a crowd of figures [...] as though a thickly packed crowd of persons was waiting there for some coming event’.³¹

His master’s voice

Walpole rarely used the first-person point of view, but his favoured choice of third-person omniscience means he hovers, like an extra disembodied character, over the action of most of his novels. Durward, the expatriate stretcher-bearer working for a First World War Russian Otriad in *The Dark Forest* (1916), is Walpole’s first first-person narrator. In the book’s sequel *The Secret City* (1919), Durward claims to have intended, when telling the story, upon ‘keeping myself outside the whole of it’, he concedes that no writer has ever fulfilled this intention, and goes on to prove the truth of that observation in his own case.³² While some books emphasise the thoughts and motivation of a single character, Walpole’s narrative perspective and voice favours the third-person subjective approach, communicating the

³¹ Walpole, *Harmer John*, pp. 427-428.

³² Walpole, *The Secret City*, p. 3.

thoughts, opinions, and emotions of a range of characters, the technique that Elizabeth Steele found so distracting in *Vanessa* (1933). It is in the four sprawling volumes of *The Herries Chronicle* (1939) that he is able to give this technique full scope.

Bakhtin, characterising Dostoyevsky's prose, introduced the concept of polyphony:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices', [...] not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.³³

Walpole comes closest to displaying this technique in *The Inquisitor*, a book he describes as possibly 'the best-constructed and the closest-knit narrative' of all his novels.³⁴ Within the at times feverish gothic melodrama of *The Inquisitor*, Walpole offers a diverse range of voices, and points of view largely unmediated by the authorial voice. Early in the book, the Reverend Gaselee attends Evensong, and via his thoughts introduces the history of the Cathedral, and experiences some of the foreboding that will permeate the book. Later at a party he teases the curate Bird with his observations upon the other guests, which piece of exposition effectively introduces the characters of the 'Cathedral set'. Each main character, and some minor ones, have their turn in the focus, and Walpole for the most part allows the characters to speak for themselves, and keeps his judgements to himself or to the informed insight of the reader. While Caul's brutality and violence is directly commented upon, and the reader is not made privy to his innermost thoughts, he is allowed, through his oratory to a Seatown meeting, to display some of the charisma that has made him a leader in that particular neighbourhood. Elizabeth Furze, the put-upon daughter of the moneylender, confides her thoughts and feelings in a private diary, as suits a character whose conversational outlets are limited, due to the pariah-status inflicted upon her by the

³³ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p.6.

³⁴ Walpole, *The Inquisitor*, p. x.

association with her father. This technique is effective, and consequently when Walpole the omniscient author intrudes, in his introductory description of the character of Penny Marlowe, ‘Not long ago I saw, in Jamaica, a water-colour by Koren’, it strikes a jarring note.³⁵ There is a similarly disconcerting intrusion in *Harmer John*. In that book, Walpole has introduced Polchester as ‘our town’ but for the most part the book continues in third-person subjectivity.³⁶ Miss Midgeley the resident writer is allowed a couple of epistolary extracts from her diary, but Walpole himself makes a startling appearance about three-quarters of the way through when he announces ‘And here I must, I am afraid, bring myself into it’.³⁷ Quite why he must is unclear, as the story continues in a mixture of first-person and third-person narration, with the latter involving private thoughts and meetings that Walpole or his narrating avatar should not be aware of given the conceit of his narrative voice.

Gloried dreams of Hugh

Reacting to reading Walpole’s *Hans Frost* (1929), Virginia Woolf wrote, ‘I expect all his books are gloried dreams of Hugh; Hugh a great man, Hugh a sinner, Hugh a lover, Hugh prodigiously wicked and so on—never a glimpse of any reality’.³⁸ Woolf attributes Walpole’s success to this lack of reality, his books being sheer escapism. Walpole would argue, like Stevenson, that this artifice, rather than that much-despised realism, is what fiction is all about. Borges writes that the psychological or ‘realistic’ novel has to mask its own

³⁵ Walpole, *The Inquisitor*, p. 56.

³⁶ Walpole, *Harmer John*, p. 3.

³⁷ Walpole, *Harmer John*, p. 374.

³⁸ Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf: A Reflection of the Other Person (The Letters Vol. IV: 1929-1931)*, Nigel Nicholson and Joanne Trautmann eds. (London, Hogarth Press, 1975-80), in *Virginia Woolf: The Complete Collection*, letter to V. Sackville-West, 17/09/1929, letter 2068, location 102994 of 182519.

artifice by using ‘each vain precision (or each languid obscurity) as a new proof of verisimilitude’.³⁹

If Woolf thought Walpole’s novels were some sort of wish-fulfilment, what of actual autobiographical content? Walpole cited four novels as his ‘autobiography’: *Fortitude* (1913), *The Captives* (1920), *Harmer John* (1926), and *John Cornelius* (1937).⁴⁰ All four ‘autobiographical’ novels feature characters beset by hardships, both mental and physical, and perhaps the Walpole who felt himself surrounded by ‘enemies’ identified with a sense of persecution.⁴¹ *Fortitude* the ‘biography’ of Walpole’s fictional novelist Peter Wescott, seems a reasonable candidate for autobiography, *The Captives* and *Harmer John*, less so. *The Captives* is an unrelentingly grim tale about the vicissitudes of Maggie Cardinal, the unloved daughter of an Anglican rector, who upon her father’s death is taken in by two aunts who belong to a millennial religious cult awaiting the Second Coming. One can only assume that autobiography in this case involves Walpole, as the son of a Bishop, dissecting religious faith and observance. *Harmer John* as previously described, has a gymnastics instructor leading a crusade against social deprivation, before being eventually brought down by vested interests. *John Cornelius* is a more obvious candidate for autobiography as it deals with a misunderstood writer navigating literary fashions.

John Cornelius is described as a spectacularly ugly, gauche prodigy, who finds fame writing fairy stories when he wants to be recognised as a ‘serious’ writer. The character is based upon one of Walpole’s heroes, Hans Anderson, and by his own account himself.⁴² Walpole

³⁹ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Prologues: Adolfo Bioy Casares, *The Invention of Morel*’, in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (London, Penguin Books, 2000), p. 243.

⁴⁰ Walpole, journal entry, quoted in Hart-Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 385. Jessie Marion Porter submitted a scrupulous but fairly conventional treatment of this in her thesis, *Hugh Walpole: Formative Influences*, as part of her MA submission to Boston University Grad. School in 1939, at <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/4495> [accessed 25/08/2019].

⁴¹ Hart-Davis, p. 316.

⁴² Hart-Davis, pp. 358-359.

also inserted some portraits of fellow writers, Somerset Maugham as Archie Bertrand being the only one obvious from his description, ‘His long bony body, the pale cadaverous countenance’, also ‘a cynic, a pessimist, and above all (what he most wishes to be) a realist’, whose writing is in ‘a simple English style’.⁴³ Other portraits are not now so recognisable and may be composite characters: Stromberg is a critic who hates romance writing, Carstang is a writer and painter who blasts his fellow artists somewhat in the manner of Wyndham Lewis.

Putting any direct autobiographical element to the book aside, *John Cornelius* highlights the way Walpole continually inserts representations of himself into his books, three in this case. Not only is the book a biography-cum-memoir of John Cornelius, a fantasy writer who like Walpole longs to be taken seriously, it is written in the first-person by ‘H.W.’. The book also features the ‘plump, cherubic, rosy-faced’ and urbane, Simeon Rose, whose work is ‘garrulous, long-winded, often platitudinous, sentimental and unreal (often also readable, for he has an excellent narrative gift)’, yet another Walpole self-portrait.⁴⁴ Cornelius’s friend Anne accosts Rose when she realises he is the author of *Fidelity*, and thanks him for writing a sentence which has helped her through life: “‘It’s not fidelity of the spoken word that matters but of the spirit’”.⁴⁵ Everyone laughs at this as Rose has been teased about the line, which is clearly a reference to Walpole’s *Fortitude* and its own opening line “‘’Tisn’t life that matters! ’Tis the Courage you bring to it’”.⁴⁶ The embarrassment of self-portraits in *John Cornelius* highlights the fact that not only is Walpole unable to make his authorship invisible, a benchmark for modernist literature, but he is unable to keep versions of himself out of his narratives.

⁴³ Walpole, *John Cornelius*, p. 287.

⁴⁴ Walpole, *John Cornelius*, p. 287.

⁴⁵ Walpole, *John Cornelius*, p. 313.

⁴⁶ Walpole, *Fortitude*, p. ix.

The author as character

In the history of Walpole performing cameos in his own books, he appears first as Pomfret-Walpole, a poor scholar in *Mr Perrin and Mr Traill* (1911), then as ‘Hugh Seymour’ in the ‘Prologue’ and ‘Epilogue’ stories in the anthology *The Golden Scarecrow* (1915). Walpole describes these as ‘almost the only pages of direct autobiography’ he has written.⁴⁷ Hugh Seymour grows up and takes the Bar but finds himself mistaken for Harvey Seymour a promising young novelist. This Seymour is introduced as a friend of Henry Trenchard in *The Green Mirror* (1918). He is plump and jolly, with a prominent chin, bases his novels ‘upon certain agreeable moral axioms’ and gets into an argument about Russia and Russian literature with Philip Mark.⁴⁸ While the character of Seymour shares some of Walpole’s physical attributes and optimism, his dismissal of Dostoyevsky and defence of the literary novel distances him from his creator. Seymour pops up again in *The Young Enchanted* (1921), where his inane interjection defuses Amos Campbell’s tirade against highbrows. Campbell, ‘popular and Trollopian’ and ‘prosperous and jolly and optimistic’ is also Walpole, and as described in this study’s earlier chapters is the first of Walpole’s avatars to take issue with modernism, and espouse his doctrine that literature should be fun.⁴⁹ Robsart, the successful novelist who befriends Peter Wescott in a story in *The Thirteen Travellers* (1921), expresses Walpole’s belief that there is nothing new about modernist technique, and announces he is about to take them on at their own game. In *Jeremy at Crale* (1927), Walpole is one of the guest speakers at the end-of-term meal for Jeremy’s school and succeeds in boring and embarrassing the boys. In *Captain Nicholas* (1934), the writer ‘Somerset Ball’ is not Walpole’s revenge upon Somerset Maugham as Nicholas Shakespeare assumes, but with his red face and reassuring manner, and his ability to draw on his

⁴⁷ Hugh Walpole, ‘Preface’, *The Golden Scarecrow* (London, Macmillan, 1934), p. ix. Subsequent references are to this edition.

⁴⁸ Walpole, *The Green Mirror*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. 202.

experience of fear for his novels, he is Walpole again.⁵⁰ Bauman the ‘incomer’ writer of Lakeland novels, whose mere existence so infuriates Colonel Fawcus in *A Prayer for My Son* (1936), is kept off-stage. The embarrassment of surrogate Walpoles in *John Cornelius* (1937) has already been addressed but one of them, Simeon Rose, receives a mention in Walpole’s last completed work *The Killer and the Slain* (1942). John Talbot has a low opinion of Rose and his ‘old-fashioned, romantic, platitudinous’ novels, until Rose writes him a letter enthusing over one of Talbot’s own books, whereupon Talbot feels quite friendly towards him and his ‘high shining forehead’.⁵¹

This insertion of himself into his books seems a harmless conceit and may well have passed Walpole’s contemporary readers by. Yet if his readers did recognise him, then all the better for the maintenance of his image: romantic, successful, modest and self-deprecating, but possessed of strong opinions, particularly about literature, which he is not averse to sharing. The latter-day scholar has the advantage of access not only to Walpole’s entire oeuvre, including his critical opinions, but other biographical details, as well as full-colour reproductions of his portraits, attesting to the impressive build and high-colouring so often mentioned in the descriptions of his literary manifestations.⁵² Hart-Davis and Elizabeth Steele barely mention this facet of his output, but given that Walpole used his fiction to comment upon the literary scene, it seems pertinent that the mouthpiece he used for criticism of the modern novel was so often the popular, romantic, commercially successful, and cheerful, if occasionally pompous and self-satisfied, writer-characters here encountered. That

⁵⁰ Nicholas Shakespeare, ‘Introduction’ to *Vintage Maugham: Cakes and Ale* (New York, Vintage Books, 2000), collected under ‘Essays’ at <https://www.nicholasshakespeare.com/writings/essays/cakes-and-ale/> [accessed 11/02/2020].

⁵¹ Walpole, *The Killer and the Slain*, pp. 30-31.

⁵² Walpole had his portrait painted by Gerald Kelly, Augustus John, Walter Sickert, Stephen Bone, and R. G. Eves. The best example of ‘the impressive build and high-colouring’ noted above, features in the painting by John as used on the cover of the 1997 paperback edition of *Hugh Walpole* by Rupert Hart-Davis from Sutton Publishing. This image is copyright of the estate of the painter, and of King’s School, Canterbury, where the picture hangs, and no link is available. See also: Nicholas Redman, ‘Walter Sickert’s Portraits of Hugh Walpole’, *The Hugh Walpole Review*, Volume 1, Number 1, Spring 2020, pp. 49-53, and https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/view_as/grid/search/works_auto:hugh-walpole [accessed 22/10/20].

the self-portraits were often satirical and mildly disparaging are entirely compatible with Walpole's notion that the novel should be 'fun', but that in no way undermines his message, and only goes to intensify the irony of his eventual caricature as Alroy Kear in *Cakes and Ale*.

Even the apparently idiosyncratic quirk of caricaturing himself in his novels has a bearing upon Hugh Walpole's literary reputation, briefly reanimated through the mediumship of these pages to engage in debate with literary modernism. Modernism has been identified as the period when the authority of the writer was challenged, both by the submergence to the point of invisibility of the author in the work, and by the appearance of texts left open to reinterpretation by the reader. The status of the author has been described by Barthes as a commercially-motivated construction to facilitate the sale of books, and Walpole in the painstaking management of his image, both inside and outside of his fiction, seems to typify this.⁵³ This management of his career is even more apparent in Walpole's commercial relationship with his publisher.

The impact of commerce

One view of Hugh Walpole that emerges from Rupert Hart-Davis's biography is of a fussy, over-sensitive soul, hopelessly impractical, constantly in arrears with his tax returns, and doggedly accident-prone, this last drawing comparison with Mr Pooter from George and Weedon Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody* (1892).⁵⁴ Against this image is the smooth operator 'outed' by Somerset Maugham in *Cakes and Ale* (1930), a tireless self-publicist shrewdly enhancing his public profile by paying court to reviewers, and anyone who could advance his career. A further 'version' of Hugh Walpole emerges from a study of his correspondence

⁵³ Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image Music Text*, pp. 142-143.

⁵⁴ Hart-Davis, p. 41.

with his publisher Macmillan, that of someone who seems to have an acute understanding of the publishing business and his own market.

In a letter to Macmillan in September of 1927, anticipating publication of his new novel *Wintersmoon* the following year, Walpole argued the case for Spring publication, because of a perceived overcrowding of the Autumn lists, & in order to test if an 'important book' could take advantage of an appearance earlier in the year.⁵⁵ Setting out his reasons for early publication, he says there has been no novel by him in 1927 – his school story *Jeremy at Crale*, written in 1926, did appear that year – and that he hears that the Autumn of 1928 is to be crowded with important books by other writers. Looking at that year's new books, there was *The Last Post*, Ford Madox Ford's finale to the *Parade's End* tetralogy, Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, Woolf's *Orlando*, Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, and a brace of Dorothy L. Sayers' 'Lord Peter Wimsey's'. Walpole also notes that his collaboration with J. B. Priestley, *Farthing Hall*, was due out in the Spring of 1929, and he thinks that this would be too close to the autumn of 1928 appearance of *Wintersmoon* to make an impact. This is an important point because the collaboration with his new friend Priestley was in order for the younger writer to benefit from the sales guaranteed by the Walpole name, so that Priestley might have sufficient income to concentrate on his own work *The Good Companions* (1929). If *Farthing Hall* was to appear too soon after a major work like *Wintersmoon*, 'Walpole fatigue' might affect sales, which would have defeated the object. Persisting with his call for Spring publication, Walpole proposes an experiment to see if having *Wintersmoon* on sale from February to the summer counterbalanced the advantage of Christmas sales.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Walpole, Correspondence with Macmillan and Co., British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), item 136.

⁵⁶ Walpole, Correspondence with Macmillan and Co., British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), item 136.

Basically, the author wanted a Walpole book in the shops from Spring onwards, to see whether those sales could compete with publishing during the commercially fertile Christmas period. He points out that Macmillan would still have a Walpole in the Autumn list, with the short story collection *The Silver Thorn* (1928). This is an author deeply involved with the commercial side of publishing, engaging with issues of marketing and consumer habits.

In November of the same year (1927) Walpole is urging Macmillan to get the galley proofs of *Wintersmoon* to publishers Doran in the USA, as it might qualify for the Book of the Month selection over there, which he believes could guarantee an extra 50,000 copies in sales.⁵⁷ There is also an ongoing plea, throughout Walpole's correspondence with his publishers, of the necessity to get early review copies out well-ahead of publication. As Chairman of the Book Society in the UK, Walpole would have been well aware of the advantage of this. In April of 1928, following its appearance, Walpole is claiming that the success of *Wintersmoon* confirms that Spring publication is best.⁵⁸

George Doran had merged with Doubleday in 1927 and, as it had managed to double his sales in the USA, Walpole writes that he thoroughly approved of the new firm. *Wintersmoon* had sold 90,000 copies in America and was one of that year's bestsellers. He was disappointed that the book hadn't reached 40,000 sales at home when someone like Warwick Deeping had sold 50,000.⁵⁹ Despite the criticism his own work faced from 'highbrow' critics, Walpole wasn't immune from making value judgements on the work of other middlebrow authors.

⁵⁷ Walpole, Correspondence with Macmillan and Co., British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), item 141.

⁵⁸ Walpole, Correspondence with Macmillan and Co., British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), items 159-161.

⁵⁹ Walpole, Correspondence with Macmillan and Co., British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), 1928, items 178-179.

In discussing *Rogue Herries*, Walpole is very concerned that, even though the books are something of a departure, the presentation and binding should follow the format of his other work, and he spends a certain amount of space arguing the case for a higher cover price. In October 1929 he is determined that the book should be 10/6 – the equivalent of about £23 pounds today - rather than the usual 7/6. The average wage in 1930 was about £200 pa, so that was a substantial sum. His reasoning is that the book is 50,000 words longer than his previous – which was the best-selling *Wintersmoon* - and he considers it to be a better book than Francis Brett Young's *My Brother Jonathan* (1928), which was much shorter, and still sold 20,000 copies at 10/6. Walpole says the book can be made to look grand and dignified at 10/6, and readers do make a distinction by price and appearance, also it can have even better sales later in a cheap edition. Last but not least, he says he likes getting the bigger royalty.⁶⁰

A New World Order

Hugh Walpole had intended in his fiction to chart social history in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. As seen, his examination of society had a narrow focus, his desire to retain good things from the past caused him to fear the radical proposals of progressive 'destroyers', and his views on modernity *per se* became hard to disentangle from his views on modern literature. The state of the nation was a popular theme with cultural commentators of the old school by the mid-1930s, J. B. Priestley published his *English Journey* (1934), and Philip Gibbs produced *England Speaks* (1935) and *Ordeal in England* (1937), an anti-socialist riposte to both Priestley, and to Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). In *Ordeal in England*, while not advocating appeasement, or glossing over the reality of Nazi ambitions

⁶⁰ Walpole, Correspondence with Macmillan and Co., British Library, Western Manuscripts: MS 54958, Vol. CLXXIII (1916-1929), items: 214-216.

under Hitler, Gibbs offers the optimistic hope that war with Germany ‘will not happen if we do not wish it to happen’.⁶¹

War did happen, and in 1941 Hugh Walpole contributed to the Macmillan War Pamphlets, a series of propaganda leaflets designed to bolster the Home Front. These pamphlets were written by noted cultural figures of the day, such as the historian A. P. Herbert, the political theorist Harold Laski, the philosopher Cyril Joad, and novelists such as Walpole, A. A. Milne, E. M. Forster and Dorothy L. Sayers. There were some sixteen pamphlets in all, published between 1940 and 1941. The first eight instalments from 1940 were reviewed by *Kirkus Reviews* (under its original title *Bulletin* from Kirkus’ Bookshop Service) in February of 1941.⁶² The next sequence of pamphlets began with Hugh Walpole’s *Open Letter of an Optimist* (1941).

Of particular note among the essayists are those identified as socialists, probably indicative of the rise of the kind of non-Marxist ethical socialism advocated by economic historian and Christian Socialist R. H. Tawney, and entirely compatible with the Calvinist social-reformist origins of publisher Macmillan. The campaigning former Trade Unionist and Labour MP J. R. Clynes’s *When I Remember* traced the benefits to England of the peaceful social revolutions of the previous half-century. In *The Rights of Man*, the socialist economist Harold Laski contrasted the compact between the citizen and the State in a modern democracy, with the subjugation of the individual in Nazi Germany. R. H. Tawney contributed *Why Britain Fights*, and *Dynamic Democracy* came from the socialist journalist Francis Williams, former editor of the *Daily Herald*, who became Controller of Press Censorship and News at the Ministry of Information in 1941. What is interesting is that within his own pamphlet, Walpole too cites a form of socialism based on the ethics of Christianity.

⁶¹ Philip Gibbs, *Ordeal in England (England Speaks Again)* (London, The ‘Right’ Book Club, 1938), p. 423.

⁶² *Kirkus Review*, review ‘Let There Be Liberty’ (New York, Virginia Kirkus Bookshop Service, 1941), at <https://www.kirkusreviews.com/book-reviews/ap-herbert/let-there-be-liberty/> [accessed 27/05/2019].

Walpole's pamphlet *Open Letter of an Optimist*, 'addressed' to Alan Bott, his friend and fellow founder member of The Book Society, returns to the theme of the anticipated 'beautiful and progressive civilisation' that the Rising City was intended to chart in the aftermath of the First World War.⁶³ Walpole claims that the hope was that the War would 'destroy' the old Britain of 'money, the neglect of the poor, and [...] Imperialism' and it did, but what replaced it was no better.⁶⁴ In fact, as Walpole's fiction frequently attests, the old Britain was somewhat transformed, during a liminal period of uncertainty, but money, neglect, and Imperialism continued in one form or another, while Walpole emerges as anxious about the consequences of any form of destruction. Walpole's text in his pamphlet is that Britain is now being offered a second opportunity at regeneration, and can emerge from this War a better place.

Open Letter of an Optimist is romantic and utopian, hardly surprising given its ambit as propaganda, but within its scope it concisely addresses those themes that Walpole tried and often failed to capture in his fiction. Walpole writes that every man's ideas about the future arise from his character and interests, and that his own preoccupations have been with the arts. He condemns himself for his ignorance of the realities of politics and economics, and for finding refuge in an ivory tower when he became a successful novelist.⁶⁵ He admits he was largely oblivious to the experience of an under-class with its own aspirations, despite being confronted with it during his early abortive career in a Seaman's Mission in the Liverpool slums, on the streets of Petrograd during the Russian Revolution, and when he joined the bourgeois mobilisation to break the General Strike of 1926.⁶⁶

Despite seeing the failure to build a better world after the Great War as a mistake, Walpole continues to equivocate around the passing of the old one, praising the merits it held for the

⁶³ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

⁶⁴ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 7-10.

few even as he deplores its inequalities. The *Open Letter* condemns fin-de-siècle celebrations of British Imperialism, describes the heroes of Kipling's *Stalky and Co.* (1899) as 'infant Görings, Himmlers and Goebbels', but praises the benefits of British colonialism.⁶⁷ The British class system is described as both 'destructive' and yet ingrained, with multitudes 'who preferred to remain on that side of the barrier, who had even a certain pride in keeping to their class, in touching their hats and performing, at any rate spiritual, curtsies'.⁶⁸ The British Public School system is described as both saving and ruining modern Britain, by instilling independence and self-discipline in the service of Empire on the one hand, but propagating the same narrow patriotism that Hitler uses to justify his regime on the other.⁶⁹

Walpole's vision of a future Britain, as laid out in his open letter, has been touched on earlier in this study. He celebrates British Philistinism and the English people's love of melodrama and farce, which seems to reinforce his particular argument for the English novel being primarily a source of entertainment.⁷⁰ Arguably, his emphasis of this, that British cultural taste is essentially biased toward popular entertainment, seems to endorse Q. D. Leavis's casting of the middlebrow tendency as one of lowered standards.

After going on to say that this war is about opposing ideologies rather than territorial expansion, Walpole suggests that the spirit of unification among the allied powers would lead to Britain abandoning her provincial mindset and becoming a 'creative force in the making of a new world order'.⁷¹ While trumpeting the supremacy of middle-class values and middlebrow taste, Walpole sees the future as being socialist and hopes for an end to vast fortunes, followed by a redistribution of wealth, equal access to a public school standard of

⁶⁷ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁸ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 16-17.

⁷⁰ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 19-20.

⁷¹ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 22-24.

education, affordable access to the arts and a return to Christian values which he sees as the most important matter of all.⁷²

Despite painting the people of Britain as congenitally Philistine, towards the end of his open letter Walpole makes an impassioned plea on behalf of the Arts, still his abiding preoccupation. Citing an upsurge in reading, the successful theatrical season at Sadler's Wells, the pianist Myra Hess's National Gallery Concerts, and popular exhibitions of painting at the National Gallery, Walpole urges that the Arts must be made cheap and accessible.⁷³ Arguably, there was a cultural renaissance in Britain after the War, and one Walpole might have found himself at home in had he lived to see it.⁷⁴

⁷² Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 26-32.

⁷³ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 28-30.

⁷⁴ Irene Morra, and Rob Gossedge eds., *The New Elizabethan Age. Culture, Society and National Identity after World War II* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2016).

Conclusion

The first section of this study looked at the cultural background to Hugh Walpole's thirty-two-year professional writing career, a career that coincided with the appearance of literary modernism in a period now dominated by its study. In the first chapter it was suggested that literary boundaries were more porous than the stratification of literature into movements and cliques would suggest. To illustrate this, Chris Baldick has cited the eclectic guest list at one of Osbert Sitwell's parties, and this study has noted Hugh Walpole's friendship with Virginia Woolf, and the appearance of his work in various journals edited by John Middleton Murry, and in T. S. Eliot's *Criterion*. Having said that, given this study's acknowledgement of the practical basis for the period survey study, stratification is perhaps the best way to survey the literary landscape of the time, this time as a caste-system of highbrows, middlebrows, and lowbrows. One could almost take the class divisions of Polchester from Hugh Walpole's novel *The Inquisitor* (1935) as a compatible model. High-minded, high church, modernist highbrows, form the 'Cathedral Set', the 'Town' composed of trade, are middlebrows like Hugh Walpole, Frank Swinnerton, and J. B. Priestley, caring about content but not averse to commerce, and then the bohemian ruffians of Seatown, for the purposes of this conceit, are the authors of 'adventure' or pulp fiction. Middleton Murry suggested that Walpole's readers were somewhat superior socially to those of popular novelists like Ethel M. Dell and Hall Caine, and Walpole obviously considered his own work to be superior to that of writers like Gilbert Frankau and Warwick Deeping, so perhaps middlebrow could be further sub-divided into its own upper and lower strata.

It is appropriate to acknowledge that Walpole, who made his publishing debut in 1909, was a modern writer too, both temporally and in his engagement with the modern world. It is also appropriate to acknowledge that Walpole's version of modernity was never part of a

movement glorified with a suffix. In her essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown', Virginia Woolf famously marked the break with the past that occurred when 'human character changed' in 1910.¹ Meanwhile, Walpole saw those writers already embarked upon a literary career by that date displaced by the intervening War, 'too young to be truly Edwardian, too old to be creators of the future'.² Woolf seems to be looking forward, Walpole, if not actually looking back, is marooned in the present, watching as the tide of modernity flows past him and some of his peers. Hugh Walpole is not the only prominent writer from between the wars to have been forgotten and, given the cultural status he enjoyed in his lifetime, his eclipse serves to prove nothing beyond the arbitrary nature of reputation. What makes him worthy of study is his ambitious project to provide a social and cultural survey of his times, and the total immersion in an artistic milieu that saw him equating changes in wider society with the advent of new ideas in literature, and not always in a positive way.

In his biography of Virginia Woolf, Quentin Bell notes that by the mid-1930s his aunt's supposed antagonists, Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells, and presumed allies, Lawrence, Strachey, Forster and Joyce, were either deceased or quiescent. He refers to some of the other English novelists of Woolf's generation, Compton Mackenzie, Aldous Huxley, J. B. Priestley, Hugh Walpole, David Garnett and Rose Macaulay, and suggests that their failure to take up and carry forward the literary revolution, that had seemed to Woolf to be imminent in 1924, had left her the isolated survivor of a movement that had fizzled out.³ A second wave was coming, with the Auden-Spender group, but Bell's reading of the history emphasises that literary modernism for all its influence, much of it applied retrospectively, was a coterie movement in a narrow window of time.

¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown', in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, location: 57916 of 182519.

² Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

³ Quentin Bell, *Virginia Woolf: A Biography. Volume Two: Mrs Woolf 1912-1941* (London, The Hogarth Press, 1972), p. 185.

Walpole's determination to document the first three decades of twentieth-century England in fiction, was bolstered by his conclusion that people probably read novels for their representation of past social conditions.⁴ This conclusion seems akin to Fredric Jameson's later observation that the realistic novel is effectively an historical novel in the making.⁵ Walpole, as a self-confessed romantic, would have balked at any suggestion that his novels were attempts at realism, but the romantic-realist hybrids he produced at least attempted to document social change in a liminal period.

Walpole concentrated upon the problems of a privileged class, the aristocracy and then the upper-middle class, or the activities of an artistic milieu, and his books chimed with a conservative-minded public, loyal to the fiction of a previous era, and hungry for reassurance after the upheaval of war and the alarming onrush of modernity. The novels were intended to be traditional in style but Walpole was closer to the mark when he observed that he found *The Duchess of Wrexhe* (1914) 'historical' when he revisited it a mere twenty years later.⁶ Admittedly, much had happened in the intervening two decades, but commenting upon another book, *The Green Mirror* (1918), the year before publication, he already found it belonging 'in style and method and subject, to a day that seems to us already old-fashioned'.⁷

Walpole seems cognisant of the conflict implicit in documenting the pace of modernity using a narrative technique from a previous era, hence his declared ambition, in the mid-1920s, to write 'novels that will follow the main tradition of the English novel, but that will be aware of the modern technique and modern psychology'.⁸ For Walpole that intention never translated into conviction; he saw nothing new in modernism, and no advance in

⁴ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, p. xi.

⁵ Jameson, 'The Historical Novel Today, or, Is It Still Possible?', in *The Antimonies of Realism*, p.264.

⁶ Walpole, *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, p. vii.

⁷ Walpole, *The Green Mirror*, p. vii.

⁸ Walpole, in Edward J. O'Brien, ed., *Best British Short Stories of 1926*, pp. 424-425.

literary technique between Swift and Huxley, Sterne and Joyce, and Austen and Woolf.⁹ As for psychology, he believed that it was Henry James who should be credited as the discoverer of that ‘new continent’ with the late fiction James published around the turn of the century.¹⁰ This lack of conviction that there was anything particularly new about the modern novel was bound up with a concern that the remorseless quest for novelty would see the traditional novel cast aside. This cultural misgiving had its corresponding anxiety, that the urge to ‘make it new’ in society as a whole would see the good things about the past cast aside as well. These associated fears saw Walpole combine his worries for the future. New ideas about literature and new ideas about society were interchangeable, and were expressed by characters identified by Clemence Dane as the ‘Destroyers’.¹¹ Walpole’s fiction then engages in an uncertain balancing act between his desire to acknowledge modernity and the combative reaction he displays in its metaphorical representation.

In one sense Hugh Walpole’s uneasiness with literary modernism provides the movement with a coherence that it might otherwise lack, given its contradictions. George Orwell writing in 1940 suggested that it might not have been apparent that Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Huxley and Lytton Strachey, represented a ‘movement’, because of their ‘completely different tendency’, and that any movement as such was marked by mutual antipathies.¹² Virginia Woolf for her part was particularly scathing in a response to Hugh Walpole’s report that in a radio broadcast on her novel *The Waves* (1931), and on Walpole’s *Judith Paris* (1931), Harold Nicholson had portrayed the writers as occupying separate and antagonistic schools. Nicholson, she says, is ‘damnably wrong’, and to teach the public to read them that way ‘is a crime and a scandal, & accounts for the imbecility that makes all criticism worthless’, then going on to say that she is tired ‘of being caged with

⁹ Walpole, *The Waverley Pageant*, p. xxxiii.

¹⁰ Walpole, *The English Novel*, pp. 26-27.

¹¹ Dane, p. 58.

¹² Orwell, *Inside the Whale*, pp.24-29.

Aldous, Joyce and Lawrence!’¹³ Walpole, antagonistic as he was to the movement, nevertheless represented modernism as a united front. In his satirical portraits of artistic gatherings, he allowed a variety of highbrows to voice their advocacy for ‘some kind of a literary standard’, while they were going head-to-head with his fictional middlebrow alter-egos like Peter Wescott and Amos Campbell.¹⁴ Who knows, for some of Hugh Walpole’s readers, and there were tens of thousands of them, his novels might have been the first time they became aware that there was such a thing as modernism and what it stood for.

George Orwell, having suggested the different tendency and often mutual antipathy within his core of male modernists, did see a unifying characteristic, their ‘temperamental similarity [...] *pessimism of outlook*’.¹⁵ If listing the distinctions between middlebrow Walpole and the highbrows, then one might start here: Walpole was an optimist. Middleton Murry notes that while 1919 and 1920 were depressing Walpole was far too much of an optimist to confront that fact, and had no wish to dismay his readers but to reassure them.¹⁶ Walpole considered this charge in his preface to *The Thirteen Travellers* (1934 [1921]). ‘What the novelist had to do was to hold on to some of the good pre-War things and at the same time to be alive to all the new things as well’, if this resulted in a view of him as possessing ‘an uncritical enthusiasm for almost anything’, he was actually fearful that the novel would become ‘precious and sanctified’ instead of the ‘jolly, human, lively thing’ he claims the form was intended to be.¹⁷ This reading of the novel’s purpose aside, Walpole comes perilously close here to acknowledging the novel as a literary genre in its own right.

¹³ Virginia Woolf, *The Letters: A Reflection of the Other Person (The Letters Vol. IV: 1929-1931)* in *Virginia Woolf: Complete Collection*, letter to Hugh Walpole, 8th November 1931, item 2467, location: 108792 of 182519.

¹⁴ Walpole, *The Young Enchanted*, pp. 205-209.

¹⁵ Orwell, *Inside the Whale*, pp.24-29.

¹⁶ Murry, p. 584.

¹⁷ Walpole, *The Thirteen Travellers*, pp. ix-x.

Walpole's intention, to blend traditional narrative with an awareness of modern psychology, in practice placed the greater emphasis on the prose style and techniques of a previous era. His literary philosophy, that 'good things' such as a tradition of plot-driven character-based narrative prose should provide a foundation for the modern novel, was compatible with the 'social' message of his fiction, that the good things of the past should be preserved and taken forward as society rebuilt after the War. His authorial voice is that of an observer emphasising caution in the rush to 'make it new', when hastiness could precipitate destruction. It is notable that the vocabulary of destruction is harnessed to describe both literary and social efforts at change. In *The Young Enchanted* (1921), Grace Talbot destroys in print those novels that do not match her own vision of what fiction should be, in *Wintersmoon* (1928), Rosalind says that to build a new world they must destroy the old. Walpole wrote for a generation that had lived through a war, and having witnessed destruction would, one imagines, have little appetite for even its metaphorical expression, and would draw their own conclusions as to the character of those advocating it.

Wintersmoon is perhaps the most explicit statement of the danger that the advocates of wholesale change might destroy both good and bad in their efforts to remake the world. Elsewhere in Walpole's mainstream novels, through his use of the 'intruder' motif, he presents two different kinds of threat, the threat to the good things of the past, those traditional values, and the threat to the maintenance of a sterile status quo. A bad or negative threat, on the one hand, and a potentially positive 'threat' on the other, facilitated in both cases by disruptive interlopers. Both types of intruder are ultimately agents of destruction, and even when a sterile and constricting status quo is the target there are inevitably victims. In *The Wooden Horse* (1909), Harry Trojan rekindles his relationship with his son, but the loving Aunt who has brought the boy up is driven from the family circle. Phillip Mark in *The Green Mirror* (1918), extricates Katherine from the Trenchard family but at the expense of

the woman's relationship with her mother. Nathalie inspires Hans Frost to rediscover his creative zest but at the cost of his marriage. Christina's arrival at Scarlatt in *The Sea Tower* (1939) tips her mother-in-law into violent insanity. The message is ambivalent, all change it seems results in some casualties. Even when the intruders are opportunistic rogues such as Captain Nicholas, or nihilists such as Semyonov in *The Dark Forest* (1916) and *The Secret City* (1919), and the relationships or family circles they disturb appear to be stable and content, their intrusive actions often expose the cracks in the existing façade.

These recurrent plots of disruptive intruders upsetting fragile scenarios not only emphasise the uncertain times when the novels were written, but hark back to a literary tradition. Where the intruder is a long-lost relative, such as Harry Trojan, or Francis Breton in *The Duchess of Wrexe* (1914), Semyonov in *The Secret City*, even Nathalie in *Hans Frost* (1929), the theme of something coming out of the past, to expose secrets or make claims, seems like a variation on a central trope of gothic writing. Except in the character of the titular matriarch in *The Duchess of Wrexe*, Walpole does not exploit that other staple of gothic fiction, the toxic aristocrat. Walpole, like his hero Scott, is concerned with the passing of an old order, concerned here being the operative word as he clearly holds the aristocracy in some regard. Douglas Goldring facetiously suggested that the nobility provided not only Walpole's theme but his core readership. Aside from the Herries books, titled characters are significant in barely a half-dozen novels, but Janet and Wildherne's marriage in *Wintersmoon*, once over its convenience stage and blossoming into true love, is touted as a coalition between bourgeoisie and gentry that will defeat the iconoclastic pairing of Rosalind and Ravage. Walpole wields his metaphor again, good things about the past, personified by Wildherne, felicitously conjoined with Janet, a modern young woman, albeit one without her sister Rosalind's radical streak.

During the Second World War, in a piece of non-fiction, Walpole considered English society poised at a transitional stage, the status quo this time being threatened by the conflict rather than by one of his fictional intruders, and once again in a positive way. In *Open Letter of An Optimist* (1941), Walpole saw post-war Britain becoming both socialist and middle-class, and clearly hoped for that brotherhood of Man yearned for by Doctor Christopher in *The Duchess of Wrexhe*, and lurking as a unifying motif within *The Herries Chronicle* (1939). Walpole saw Britain becoming less provincial, thanks to having had to cooperate with her European allies, and going on to pursue what he believed to be the middle-class aspirations of privacy, property-owning, access to education, religious and political tolerance, and free speech. He hoped for a redistribution of wealth and an end to class privilege.¹⁸ Eighty years on some of Walpole's hopes have been realised, but nostalgia for an imagined England of the past seems to linger.

In the preface to the Cumberland Edition of *Harmer John* (1934 [1926]) Walpole revealed that in his novels he had intended to create a fictional world to represent 'the life of England in the first thirty years of the twentieth century'.¹⁹ The Herries novels, the rural subset of this wider project, ambitiously cover two hundred years of English history through the activities of its fictional family. Despite the oft-repeated statement that the Herries 'are' England in their unimaginative upper-middle-class conformity and urge to 'get on', Walpole's loyalties seem to lie with the romantic outsiders like Rogue, Judith, Adam, and Benjie, who act against this materialistic grain. In his frequent broadsides against 'realism', and its medium 'the modern novel', in his anti-intellectual stance, and with his romantic tendency, and taste for the macabre, and for all his standing as a pillar of the literary establishment, Walpole evidently felt he merited outsider status too.

¹⁸ Walpole, *Open Letter of An Optimist*, pp. 22-32.

¹⁹ Walpole, *Harmer John*, p. viii.

Taking Quentin Bell's somewhat abridged list of Compton Mackenzie, Aldous Huxley, J. B. Priestley, Hugh Walpole, David Garnett and Rose Macaulay, as Virginia Woolf's 'generation' of writers, it seems reasonable to suggest that of these names Hugh Walpole's would be the least familiar to a modern audience. The others have at least one significant work to their names, Woolf is famous for modernism and Bloomsbury, and that cachet attaches to Huxley and Garnett too. Compton Mackenzie wrote the source novel of a much-loved British film (*Whisky Galore*, Alexander Mackendrick, Ealing Studios, 1949), Priestley's work survives on the school syllabus (*An Inspector Calls* (1945)), and Macauley has her blue plaque. Elizabeth Steele submits that Walpole's posthumous reputation faltered due to the lack of his personal presence to manage it, with his 'certain penchant for publicity'.²⁰ A simpler explanation is that, unlike the roll call of writers listed above, Walpole died without producing a single emblematic work, or belonging to a group or movement that might preserve his name. Walpole epitomised the middlebrow, an ideology destined to be more practical than theoretical.²¹ Walpole died in 1941 when national attention was necessarily focussed elsewhere. He never made it into a post-war world where an existing reputation, and a continuing literary career, added to all the benefits of exposure offered by expanding broadcast media, would probably have guaranteed him a household name as it did Priestley. Notwithstanding Steele's hopeful claims for the influence of *Rogue Herries* (1930), that book and its sequels never sustained their initial impact in order to pass over into the popular consciousness. The books did have an abiding popularity in Cumberland and, it must be said, creative afterlives including a feature film (*Vanessa*, William K. Howard, MGM, 1935), television series (*The Herries Chronicle*, BBC, 1960, & *Judith Paris*, BBC, 1964), and a radio adaptation (*The Herries Chronicle*, BBC Radio 4,

²⁰ Steele, p. 18.

²¹ Curious that the late history of high modernism is seen as reactionary in its turn, in its response to mass culture. See Sultan, p.116, & Svarny, pp.2-4.

1972), and yet the Hugh Walpole name remains largely unknown. That common criticism of prolific writers, that they wrote too much and too quickly, applies to Walpole also.²²

Quite how Walpole might have fared in the 1950s and beyond is a mystery. The supposedly anti-romantic poets of ‘the Movement’ and the purveyors of ‘angry’ kitchen-sink realism, might have found him as anachronistic as they did the survivors of modernism.²³ Equally, with ‘grand old man of English letters’ status, and some subtle reinvention, he might have enjoyed an Indian summer as did Edith Sitwell, J. B. Priestley, Robert Graves, and comparative youngsters such as Noel Coward and John Betjeman. What is likely is that his engagement with historical fiction would have persisted. A journal entry from 1934 suggests the continuation of the second Herries cycle beyond *Katherine Christian* (1944), with *Men Under Skiddaw*, set during James II and William III’s regimes, planned for 1943, and *Death of Queen Anne’s Men* dealing with the reign of the titular monarch and leading into *Rogue Herries. The Killer and the Slain*, the book which this study has found to be a dramatic departure from his usual approach, and the most effective of his genre titles, was published posthumously in 1942. It is unclear what Walpole’s plans for it were, as he never mentioned the novel in his correspondence with Macmillan, and his journal entries were equally enigmatic, ‘a very odd book that nobody will like’, its creation ‘so like automatic writing’, but in technique ‘the best of my macabre’.²⁴ In the somewhat more liberated atmosphere of post-war Britain he might have found new impetus with this pared-down and erotically-charged version of his psychological-fantastic.

²² Drew Nellins Smith, ‘That’s Too Much: The Problem with Prolific Writers’, *The Millions*, September 2, 2015, at <https://themillions.com/2015/09/thats-too-much-the-problem-with-prolific-writers.html> [accessed 14/07/2020].

²³ Greg Buzwell, ‘The 1950s: English literature’s angry decade’, *Discovering Literature: 20th century*, British Library, at <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/the-1950s-english-literatures-angry-decade> [accessed 22/02/2020].

²⁴ Hart-Davis, pp. 437-438.

If, as Middleton Murry suggested, Hugh Walpole's role was to reassure his readership, arguably he was made redundant by the War, the worst thing that could happen did happen and people got on with it. He never quite achieved the chymical wedding of the traditional novel, of narrative incident and character, with the new novel of psychology and ideas. He was sentimental, prolix, and too fond of intervening as an omniscient narrator. His good plots, and startling passages of inventive writing, were often hamstrung by his urgency to be on with the next thing, and his consequent reluctance to edit or rewrite. He is not the only writer from this period to be forgotten, but while the study of modernism, and the canon approach to literature, can account for at least a partial eclipse of some formerly prominent names these are not the only reasons. In the end his novels are 'historical', whereas the canonical texts of modernism seem timeless.

For all the debate about whether 'alien' modernism could ever settle and flourish long-term in England's hostile literary environment, as touched upon in Chapter One, the movement marks a point where self-conscious novels, wherein 'nothing happens', liberate the text from single narrated meanings. From Hugh Walpole's perspective, the modernist novel is self-conscious because it is overly concerned with technique and the minutiae of detail that makes it 'realistic', and 'nothing happens' because no emphasis is placed upon a developing plot with a resolution. From a modernist perspective, any self-consciousness arises from an acknowledgement that interpretation is subjective, and that life rarely conforms to the conventions of structured narrative. Walpole too is 'self-conscious', in the manner in which he inserts himself into proceedings and seeks to impose meaning. When Walpole's backseat narration is put on hold, as in the 'automatic writing' of *The Killer and the Slain*, the narrative flow he considers to be integral to the traditional English novel is greatly improved. The concern that Walpole expressed about the direction of the novel form was perhaps validated in that modernism led to literary semiotics, which could at times unshackle

literature from its cultural climate, as John Frow would argue in his criticism of Julia Kristeva.²⁵ The whole interest of this study lies in the fact that Walpole felt cut adrift within a cultural moment, neither Edwardian nor one of Virginia Woolf's Georgians, and he felt that post-war English society found itself in a similar state of limbo. If literary modernism illustrated this state by reflecting its uncertainty, and by declining to offer to navigate a way out, Walpole sought to offer his readers guidance while criticising those contemporaries he considered to be self-indulgent navel-gazers. There was room for both schools of thought at the time but space becomes at a premium when studying literary history. Regardless of any value judgement about the quality of Walpole's output, his fiction attempts to describe a culture war against a background of social change, and credit is due to his ambition.

Earlier in this study it was noted that Hugh Walpole's career could be studied in terms of various oppositions, and the writer L. A. G. Strong was to consider this in his section on Walpole as part of 'Notes on Four Contemporary Writers', in his book *Personal Remarks* (1953).²⁶ Walpole admired Strong, both as a friend and as a critic who approached his work with sympathetic understanding, which helps validate Strong's assessment.²⁷ Strong remarks that true romantics, of which Walpole was one, drew their inspiration from the unconscious mind, but notes that Walpole distrusted this source, as it both disturbed him, and in his case had 'narrow limits', a restriction which he circumvented by conscious craftsmanship in his writing, and by organising his career like a business plan.²⁸ Strong goes on to say that Walpole was unable to consolidate the two pathways, creatively-inspired romantic novelist, and commercially-minded man of letters 'the opposite pole from romanticism', and this

²⁵ John Frow, *Marxism and Literary History* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 127, referenced in Allen, *Intertextuality*, pp. 56-57.

²⁶ The other writers featured were C. Day Lewis, Richard Church, and L. H. Myers, and it seems reasonable to state that of the four only Day Lewis would be a familiar name now.

²⁷ Hart-Davis, p. 344.

²⁸ L. A. G. Strong, *Personal Remarks* ((London, Peter Nevill Ltd, 1953), p.222.

resulted in a state of anxiety.²⁹ Strong suggests that while Walpole was able to harness his personal history of anxiety in his depictions of fear, his perennial theme of the battle between good and evil suffered, because he was unconvinced that the former would prevail, and the reassuring optimism he grafted into his work resulted in melodrama and sentimentality.³⁰ This analysis rings true when considering *The Killer and the Slain*, a work clearly drawn from some wellspring of the unconscious with its homoerotic and violent themes, and produced in a process he likened to ‘automatic writing’, but one that ultimately suffers for its sentimental and anticlimactic ending.

Strong’s assessment, for all its amateur psychoanalysis, emphasises the contradictions that provide the fascination the subject holds for this study. Walpole achieves his ambition to be a published writer just as a new movement seems to challenge the technique and purpose of literature itself, and the role of the author within it. He announces his intention to accommodate modern techniques and modern psychology in his writing, while retaining his loyalty to tradition. Walpole attempts to be relevant by charting social change in the early part of a new century, but his narrow focus, and occupation of an ivory tower of the arts, instead paints a picture of the culture wars accompanying the emergence of modernism. His fascination with the macabre inhabits, some critics would say infects, even his attempts at realism, while his genre writing is driven by a moral purpose reflecting changing standards in a post-war world. Current attempts to resurrect Walpole as a purveyor of Gothic romances sidestep the issue that he hardly provides a comfortable fit with genre conventions, his ‘terrors’ do not haunt the reader, they are gauntlet ordeals that his heroes must run to make an accommodation with their own souls. At the end of his life, albeit unsuspecting of his imminent demise through illness, he envisages an egalitarian post-war society where all

²⁹ Strong, p. 223.

³⁰ Strong, pp. 223-225.

might share the advantages, both intellectual and material, he acknowledges that he has been able to enjoy. The author as celebrity, commerce versus art, the nature of narrative, the evolution of the romance: the enigma of Hugh Walpole is an invitation to further debate, and emphasises the riches to be found in the marginalia and footnotes of literary history.

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